

Riaru de Reberu Age Shitara Hobo Chītona Jinsei ni Natta

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Chapter 89: Homeless Child/ Delinquent Leader on a Rainy Day

Early on a Friday Morning, in the living room terrace | On the LCD TV for the family on the news program channel, a reporter wearing a raincoat is on the TV screen, broadcasting what is happening outside.

It was the usual day of the traditional typhoon. There was no problem watching it being broadcasted but if you watch carefully, you come to an understanding that you cannot deny that there was a feeling of leaving behind an era. Because this was the age where telecasts are digitized and anyone could do simple video editing, it reached the point where accidents occurred more frequently, if you paid more careful attention.

Even now, there are countless uploads on the internet of beautiful woman reporters who's underwear can be clearly seen through transparent clothes. It's become quite festive and merry. A man completely unrelated to the disturbance, the husband of the harem • Natsuno Taiyou was sitting directly opposite of the TV, while a young elderly woman • was sitting on his lap. The physical difference between the two made them look like parent and child but if you looked closely, you would see that Kohaku had her fingers crawling around his chest. Using her fingers in a sensational way that no child could ever do. Even though her caresses were making his mind feel uneasy, it was still early in the day so Taiyou was repeating excuses in his mind to stop the uneasiness.

"I guess the typhoon will come after all. I thought it would turn away somehow or another"

"It seems so jyana"

"It's the first typhoon of the year. It's nice that school has been canceled, but I don't want it to cause damage"

"It seems so jyana"

".....Your mom's navel protrudes outward, your dad is a pop-eyed goldfish"

"It seems so jyana"

"Were you not listening at all to what I was saying!?"

He raised his voice as high as possible. Since a little while ago, it had been one thing after another. Kohaku felt like that for a long time and had only been giving half-hearted replies.

She was in a good mood, so she sat on his lap and behaved like a spoiled child to Taiyou. It would be ok if it was just that but coupled with her appearance, if it wasn't for her puns, it would feel like watching a toddler's regression.

If he thought about it, the way she used her hands were obscene, clearly grasping Taiyou's sensitive part and sexually arousing it.

Taiyou thought that it was really wicked.

That's why he retorted the way he did and she finally said words that were not half-hearted replies.

"Is it not good? Once in a while.....I feel like being spoiled in order to clear my head"

She said that in such a good mood that it could have had a heart mark attached to the end of it.

"That's fine but"

Although he was actually happy, Taiyou held back from saying it.

"Please consider the time and case"

"Time and case?"

Kohaku tilted her head in confusion, because she was still in spoiled child mode, the old lady of 130 centimeters was very cute. While holding such a girl in his lap, he glanced out the window.

It was about time for a normal typhoon to land, but only slanted rain soaked the windows, which made the windows make a rattling sound.

"As the typhoon approaches, I have to check that doors are locked and potential for fires"

"You're so serious. But I like that part of you jya"

"Well, I don't think it's worth liking"

"Taiyou-san"

"Yes?"

He lifted his head in response to the voice and Suzune's appearance was there.

How long had she been there? She suddenly bent her waist and kissed Taiyou on the lips.

When she lifted her face, she had a huge smile.

"Please leave that to us. If there is something, we will regrettably call Taiyou-san, so please flirt with Kohaku-san until then"

"Is that ok?"

"Yes! Ah! but, please be affectionate with us afterwards"

"o, ok"

Satisfied with Taiyou being flustered, she immediately departed. Without knowing if anything was checked, she went into a vacate room. On the second floor, Kotone came out of one room. She smiled when her eyes met Taiyou's and then she entered a different room. Kazane's appearance could not be seen but based on the sounds that could be heard, she was probably doing a similar thing.

The three sisters were restless but they wandered around the house looking delighted.

"Hey, Natsuno-kun"

Kohaku started purring like a cat and this time, Aoba came in. Her long straight ponytail was swinging back and forth. She was wearing her casual clothing which was a skirt and over the knee socks. She was relatively slender for her height. Her knee high socks wrapped around her slim, elegant legs, radiating healthy beauty.

Because the boundary between cloth and skin was at eye-level, Taiyou instinctively reached out and touched her exposed skin between the top of her socks and the hemline of her skirt.

"Hyan!"

"Ah, sorry, unintentional mistake"

"What are you doing!? "

"Well, you were too charming "

Taiyou put his hands together in a worshipping pose and said "sorry".

"Ah....."

Aoba blushed and muttered something. It was the word "I'm happy" but it was drowned out by the sound of rain and wind, so it did not reach Taiyou's ears.

Taiyou asked what the purpose of her visit was as if nothing happened.

"Do you have any errands for me?"

"Well, no, there's nothing. See you later!"

She ran away while blushing magnificently.

He saw her figure immediately run up the staircase and return to her room. Taiyou secretly regretted overdoing it and angering her.

"Youth is good"

"What? What do you mean?"

"Even now, you didn't turn around jya"

When Taiyou didn't understand the meaning, he tilted his head to the side.

Kohaku often refers to lines from famous works. Sometimes, she uses the original source as is and other times, there are different meanings caught up in it.

Compared to that, Hera is easy to understand just from personal experience. Even though they seemed similar, Taiyou somehow thought that it was two different people.

"Well, my husband is a nice guy. I should have said this before jya. Males such as Lions and Gorillas usually do not work, the only time they work is when enemies appears jya"

"Is that the way it is?"

"Judge for yourself, if it wasn't such a thing, would the women be delightfully wandering around? You should leave the house to the women"

".....What are your true intentions?"

"Spoil me with all of your strength!"

"Are you an orange!?"

Taiyou retorted.

He had a guess that it would end up this way. Of course, there is no objection to making love rather than spoiling Kohaku , so he thought it was ok for now. However, soon his turn came to do errands.

".....This doesn't seem to be a foreign enemy"

Within the storm, Taiyou is holding an umbrella and walking with a plastic bag hanging. Strong crosswinds blew occasionally, and each time the umbrella looked like it could be crushed.

Inside the bag near the handle that was being twisted by the wind that was blowing, was a round florescent light within a paper box. The three sisters were doing checks inside the house and this particular object was broken, so he was asked to buy a new one.

While he was in the middle of admiring Kohaku's beauty, his breathing was moderately rough and because it was leading up..... to the good part, she gave him a bitter gaze as he left.

"Well, I guess even male lions are made to run errands. but if I'm not mistaken, male lions don't need to hunt, right?"

Murmuring such things, a strong wind changed directions and blew violently.

"Woah!"

Taiyou quickly lifted the umbrella with both hands and tried to direct the tip of the umbrella in the direction the wind was blowing. However, he could not react to the wind in time and the plastic umbrella was crushed following a tearing sound.

In the rain, Taiyou was soaked in a split second and stared at the completely useless umbrella.

"It's certainly time for me to go"

He muttered. The wind that destroyed the umbrella became increasingly stronger as if it was leveling up. It then became a crosswind that made it difficult to stand. Indeed, Taiyou thought that him going was the correct solution because he could not afford to risk sending out his brides into such a storm.

He crushed his now useless umbrella with uncommon yet extraordinary strength, crumpled it, and rolled it into a large baseball. He once again headed for home. As soon as the rain blew sideways, his pants were immediately soaked, but since they were mostly submerged since the beginning, he no longer cared.

He firmly treaded one step after another towards Taiyou's Castle.

"Uh? That is....."

Suddenly, he caught sight of a figure that he recognized in his peripheral vision. Shirokiyami, with her trademark black goth-loli fashion, was standing in the center of a treeless children's playground. She stood still in the storm without evidence of an umbrella. Her long white hair that reached the back of her knees, swayed in the wind.

She was soaked with water while looking at up the sky with her usual boundless gaze.

Taiyou somehow associated her appearance with a kitten left by their owner and placed in an empty cardboard box made for selling oranges. He approached and entered the park in order to call out to her.

"What are you doing?"

".....Train...ing? "

She did not appear surprised when Taiyou suddenly called out to her, and she answered while looking up at the sky.

"Training?"

"Beating the headwinds.....training"

"Incidentally, aren't you getting wet from the cold rain? I mean, it's usually dangerous especially considering that rather than mere headwinds, a typhoon is approaching"

".....It's no wonder that it's stronger... than I thought"

"No no no, wouldn't someone normally notice this type of thing?"

"What is.....normal?"

"Never mind with the philosophical questions"

Taiyou pulled Shirokiyami's hand and walked towards the exit of the park.

"What are you.....doing?"

"Don't worry about it, just follow me"

"A rainy day.....Bancho?"

"If you understand, then just follow me without complaining"

"If I was a cat... I'd scratch you all over the place"

"You can scratch me as much you want later"

"Please give me... Milk"

"That manner of speech, I've already heard enough to make my stomach full"

"???"

While exchanging all sorts of trivial conversations in the rain, Taiyou returned home with a kitten left by their owner in an orange cardboard box... err, or rather, the girl known as Shirokiyami.

Chapter 90: Homeless Child/ The Sun within the Storm

Taiyou Castle was standing tall even in this tempest storm, Taiyou opened the door and entered. Having lost his umbrella, both Taiyou and Shirokiyami created a big puddle of water beneath their feet.

Aoba comes over with a clatter of loud steps to greet him at the front door.

"Welcome back Natsuno-kun..... Eh, why are you so soaked? And also that girl is....?"

"I'll talk about the minor details later, is the bath free right now?"

"Ah, yes. Kohaku-san said that when Natsuno-kun comes back, he'll want a bath, so we already heated the bath..."

"I won't ask why she assumed that I would need a hot bath..... But thanks."

Saying his thanks towards Aoba, he looks at Shirokiyami once again.

"Come here."

Her hands had already become completely cold due to being wet, he grabbed her and headed straight for the bathroom. Pulling open the polished glass door, she was taken to the bathroom.

"Wait a minute."

Saying that, he let go of her hand and entered the bathroom alone. The bath was hot enough to release a steamy vapor that caused the ceiling to drop down droplets of water with a *pitter patter*. The bath was really wide and it was filled to the brim with hot water.

"The water's already heated so you will be able to take a bath soon—— Eh? What are you doing!?"

Taiyou let out a loud voice instinctively. That's because Shirokiyami had already entered the bathroom and all her goth-loli clothes she normally wore were taken off and she was stark-naked.

Her white skin exposed under the fluorescent light, and her splendidly beautiful and naked body was way too ero-tic. These days, Taiyou felt like a car whose break mechanism stopped working, becoming dumbfounded he felt like his brain would just stop working.

"What do, you mean?"

On the other hand, Shirokiyami was acting normally and didn't seem to be worried about the situation at all.

"It's the bath, after all. So I took off my, clothes. It's normal, to take them off."

"Normally you wait until the guy gets out before taking them off, don't you?!"

".....Now that you mention it."

"That's not what you should be saying?! What if I lost my reason and started to attack you?!"

".....Cut?"

"That's scary! It's really scary to think that you would cut me!"

"Ah.... I made a mistake."

"Huh?"

"I'd be scar-ed?"

Saying that, she held on to her small body shaking left and right as if to hide herself. Even after she was acting cutesy and saying dialog like that, Taiyou wondered why but he still doubted her.

"No, well forget about that. I don't really expect you to act like that so. To be frank, I'd prefer if you just cut me instead."

"....You a masochist?"

"I'm obviously not!"

"Then.... Are you a super-masochist?"

"Why is it becoming worse?!"

Speaking in this sketch comedy type of way, Taiyou actually regained his cool. Shirokiyami's silly lines somehow seemed really spontaneous, so it a cooling

down effect on Taiyou's lust.

In addition to the circumstances leading to another situation, it was no longer a situation he could become aroused in any longer. Taiyou pulled Shirokiyami's hand and forcibly pushed her into the bathroom.

"Look, for the time being, just soak your body in this hot water and warm yourself up——"

In the moment he spoke. The glass door slid open with a clattering sound: *gara gara gara*.

"Welcome home nojya, Danna-sama. Don't you need your bride to wash your back for you?——"

The person who showed her face, was Kohaku who was still in her spoiled child mode. Her sleeves were rolled up, and she was holding a towel, but once she saw the scene inside of the bathroom, she exclaimed with an "Ohh".

She alternated between looking at Taiyou and at Shirokiyami, after that she closed her mouth, she went out of the bathroom but her face remained and she continued to peek inside.

"I'm sorry, it seems that I wasn't able to read the mood jya. The bath will be free for about 2 hours so please take your time."

"What do you mean by 2 hours?! As if we'd need that much time!"

"How could it be?! Don't tell me you only need three clicks to finish up?"

"That's too extreme! Or more like, the denomination used is strange!"

"Three clicks is what a King uses to count time, you know?"

"Please throw away those types of geeky obsessions!"

""""What's wrong?""""

Hearing the commotion occurring in the bathroom, the three sisters came in this time. However, the moment they see the scene in the bathroom, the three girls rapidly turn their eyes away and hid themselves in the other side of the wall.

"I'm sorry! To have intruded!"

"Koto-chan, Kaza-chan, we need to lay out a futon bed in the open room"

"I'll leave that to you, I'll go and buy a camellia flower"

"Wait a minute, you guys don't need to prepare the futon bed, the flower is also unnecessary!"

Taiyou's words seem to have no effect as the three sisters already started to move and prepare. Chasing after them to join in, Kohaku also closed the door and calmly left the scene.

Holding his own forehead, Taiyou could not help but to let out a sigh.

In comparison, Shirokiyami was as expected very calm. She slightly tilted her head before asking him.

"In a situation like this... Is it normal to lay out a futon?"

"No, it's not normal"

"What about the, Camellia flower?"

"That kind of thing only happens in a TV showcasing the Showa Era!"

Since the beginning, Taiyou wasn't planning on doing anything to her. After sighing out one more time, he pushes Shirokiyami into the bath before heading out of the bathroom.

After taking a bath, Shirokiyami looked really cute in her new outfit.

She was wearing this light blue colored Pyjamas. The three sisters prepared it for her, so judging from the size, it was probably Suzune's clothes. The pants were quite short reaching only up to her knees, and the cuff of her clothing had this vibrant red colored string wrapped around it, it was a really lovely outfit.

Originally she always dressed according to her code name Shirokiyami, and only wore either white and or black type clothing, but now that she was actually wearing all these different colors, Taiyou thought that she looked really good in them.

He was relaxing on the sofa lying on his back, but once he saw her, he stood up straight and couldn't just sit slouched anymore, that was how lovely she looked.

"Y-You've finished?"

"Yes.... I've finished"

"Have you been able to warm your body? It would be bad if you caught a cold so."

"I'm fine, I won't..... Catch a cold."

"You're saying that with an awful lot of confidence aren't you?"

"Yes, cause I'm the strongest."

"You sound silly saying that, so please stop. Although, that in itself is persuasive coming from you."

Taiyou smiled wryly after speaking with her. Although he tends to forget, she was actually known as a teenage expert who is declared as one of the strongest existences. It's easy to imagine that she's trained her body to a state where she was immune to catching mere colds.

"But all things considered, can you tell me why you were in a place like that? A typhoon is going to be coming you know? You can't be seriously saying that you were going to train in that kind of weather?"

Saying that, Taiyou glanced at the scene outside of the window. Because a typhoon was approaching the area, the intensity of the storm was increasing at a remarkable pace. The rain hitting against the window, was no longer something that could be replicated by just pouring water from a bucket.

"I was seriously, training."

"Eh?"

"I was making progress.... in the storm. Training under a waterfall or in the sea is also good.... but it's a little dangerous"

"....."

Taiyou's eyes were bewildered as he continued to stare at her.

He didn't think she was seriously training.

But, she really didn't look like she was lying to him, just like she first told him, it seemed to be the case that she was literally training in the storm.

"I'm really sorry."

Taiyou stands up straight, then he turns his body towards her and bowed deeply lowering his waist.

".....Eh?"

"If that were really true, then I have actually disturbed your training. I didn't know what you were doing.... So I'm really sorry."

"That's fine, more....importantly"

After saying that, she avoided meeting his eyes. It was like she wanted to say something, but was finding the right words to convey her message.

"I was lying... Pyon."

Making a halo by placing her fingers on top of her head, and doing an awkward pose. She looked like a child that was acting foolishly.

".... Is that so?"

Taiyou thought that she was definitely lying about lying right now. But he didn't point out this fact. She was being considerate of his feelings so he didn't want to treat her with disdain.

"Stop standing there, you should also come and sit——"

Letting bygone be bygones, she was heading to her seat when...

——Crackle, Snap.

An unfamiliar sound struck his eardrum. In the next moment, the electricity cut off.

""""Kyaaahh!""""

"What? What's wrong?"

"Ohh, this is?"

The voices of the women living in this house could be heard.

"Everyone? Are you guys alright?"

""""Yes! We're fine!""""

"No problem nojya."

Both the three sisters and Kohaku responded while talking in a slightly higher pitch. But for some reason, Aoba's reply could not be heard, thinking that this was strange, Taiyou headed towards the direction her heard the sound and called out to her once again.

"Aoba?"

Silence. Indeed, there was still no answer. Wondering if something had happened, Taiyou walked through this dim area, and headed towards Aoba's direction. And then, he found Aoba at the bottom of the stairs. She was holding her head while crouching down, and her body was trembling.

"Aoba?"

"Natsuno-kun...."

She looked up at him with teary eyes. It was apparent from her face that she was frightened by something.

"Want to hold on to me?"

"——Yes ! "

The moment he asked, Aoba flew up and jumped towards Taiyou's arms clinging to him. Even while in this position, she was trembling, even though it hasn't been long since the power cut off in the house, the small hands clinging to him were already completely cold.

"Are you scared of the dark?"

Aoba nods her head up and down. Seeing her like this, he embraced her shoulder closely, and returned to the living terrace area.

He was comforting the trembling Aoba while looking out of the window. All the lights outside seemed to have gone out and he couldn't see a single light working.

"It seems the power failure has occurred in a large area. That means that we can't do much but wait it out."

Saying this, he continued to hold her tight whilst sitting down on the sofa.

Suddenly, he noticed something.

Shirokiyami was still standing in the same spot, but she was acting weird.

Her face still remained expressionless but, this was different from her normally boundless and elusive expression..... He could see that she was tense.

Above all, her treasured sword the Reverse-Heaven that wasn't there a little while ago was now taken out and being embraced closely. It was like she was using it as a support.

"Don't tell me, you are——"

"I'm not afraid okay?"

She spoke as if she was making light of the situation. Normally Shirokiyami had this tendency to talk in broken sentences, but right now the words she spoke were very clear, for a moment he just stared at her blankly and then Taiyou started to laugh a little.

"Danna-sama."

""""Taiyou-san.""""

From the corner of his eyes, he could see both the three sisters and Kohaku. Taiyou beckons them to come over towards him. The girls rushed up to him with happy looking faces.

"I will be together with them like this until the power comes back on", Taiyou was thinking of doing this but then...

Boom.

Rumble, rumble, rumble.

Along with the thunderous sound, all the girls around him simultaneously cringe with fear (Shirokiyami went as far as to take her sword out of her scabbard). The building was shaking largely.

When he looked in the direction of the sound, he saw that the wall was destroyed by a broken gigantic tree, and the wind and rain was blowing everywhere into the house.

Chapter 91: Homeless Child / Let's travel surrounded by cute girls

Taiyou's Castle in the morning. Taiyou and Kohaku were standing in front of the empty hole. Even though they were indoors, the large empty hole was great for ventilation. The refreshing air after the typhoon departed passed through their nostrils, giving them a sense of invigoration as if they were in the meadows.

"..... I don't think we can go on like this"

Taiyou tried hard to raise their spirits but it was in vain.

Around the room was wreckage of the wall that was crushed by a huge tree. Because it was exposed to the storm all night long, it was soaked and had various kinds of garbage scattered around. Every room that had a door that was closed was safe, but the living room terrace was atrocious.

"This is unsatisfactory"

"Yes it is. I'm fairly ready to clean it, haha, but first I have to move this out the way"

Taiyou said as he proceeded to lift the tree which was the main culprit for the disaster. It was as heavy as a temple pillar and weighed several hundred kilograms; however Taiyou easily lifted it up. He went outside while avoiding hitting anything.

"So, what are we going to do about the wall?"

After looking again, the damage to the building was serious. Several walls were knocked down and it looked like ruins. Even though Taiyou could move huge objects which weighed several hundred kilograms, he was at a loss when thinking of how to restore it.

"Danna-sama, I guess this is something that can no longer be solved by an amateur jya"

"Indeed, there's no other choice but to call a Contract.....Carpenter"

"I've already called one. A Contractor will come in a bit jya. I heard them say that they will be here between today or tomorrow and have it fixed in two days "

"Awesome"

There was a double meaning behind Taiyou's words. One reason was because of how fast Kohaku operated and the other because of how the merchant would fix it in two days.

"In that case, we can't live here in the meantime. We need to find shelter somewhere"

"Yea, as one would expect, we can't live in a place where there is construction. Well then, will you come to my apartment?"

"Even if it's small, it's ok as long as I can be tightly attached to Danna-sama, but there is an even better place than that"

"A better place?"

"Hot Spring jya"

".....Come again?"

"Now, once everyone is ready, we'll leave immediately jya"

Kohaku turned around and standing in front of their gaze were the three sisters and Aoba who prepared for the journey beforehand, as well as Shirokiyami, who for some reason was standing perfectly next to them. Their eyes were shining.

When they got outside, there was one car parked there since who knows how long. It was a red minivan with six seats.

"Are we going by car?"

"That's right jya"

".....Who is driving?"

Taiyou had a bad feeling and looked around. Taiyou, the three sisters, and Aoba were all minors. Regardless of if it could be done or not, none of them were old enough to drive legally. Although Shirokiyami's age was unknown for

the time being, she could not have a license as well because she had to be the same age or younger than Taiyou.

In other words, if anyone could be called drivers, it wasn't them. Naturally, Taiyou suddenly looked at everyone again and then returned his gaze to Kohaku. She had an elated and proud face while showing a picture card she was holding. It was a driver's license, and furthermore, it was gold.

"Of course the driver is me jya"

"Wait a minute, isn't that really bad?"

"What? Will even Danna-sama take a license from an old person? Do not look down on old people. See for yourself jya"

As she said that, Kohaku opened the door and got into the driver's seat. At that moment, Taiyou was standing in front of the car, seeing the sight that he predicted through the windshield.

".....her head"

Aoba muttered something while Taiyou was holding his head. Kohaku, whose growth stopped at 130 centimeters because of her being an Eternally Little, only had a small portion of her head above the steering wheel when she got in the driver's seat.

It was just like displaying a severed head at a prison's gate.

"Huh? did you say something?"

"N, No, didn't say anything"

"Well Kohaku-san, it's not impossible right?"

"Why do you still have doubt? Shall I tell Danna-sama one good thing? This license is gold and I am not paper jya"

"In other words?"

"Does that mean you drive normally?"

"That's amazing Kohaku-san"

"No, I'm bad at driving normally, but.....oh well"

Taiyou thought that that wasn't enough questioning but decided to give up since it was futile. Kohaku wouldn't say she can drive unless she could so she wasn't lying. He couldn't erase his anxiety but decided to believe her and get in the car. So, he decided to collect everyone's luggage, opened the backdoor, and loaded it in. The three sisters and Aoba got in the car and were in the backseat.

"Are you ready?"

Kohaku asked.

""""Yes, certainly""""

"Yes, I am"

The sounds from the 3.1 channel could be heard from left and right.

"Let's go.....go"

This time a voice was heard from the top of the roof.

"Well——"

"——wait a minute!!!"

Taiyou cried out, opened the door, jumped out, and looked up at the roof of the car. There, Shirokiyami was wearing her usual Goth-Loli clothes. She did not enter the car but was sitting on top of it with her knees aligned to the roof, and had a sheathed Japanese sword on her lap.

"Why are you there!?"

"I got...on the car"

"Get inside. Why the roof? "

"I want to feel.....the wind?"

"Cool dude! ...but you probably shouldn't do that. It'll be dangerous if you fall from there"

"It's ok. I.....won't fall. Besides, a swordsman on the roof of the car..... increases market price"

"No no. What would you do if you were seen by the police?"

".....kill?"

She showed him a napkin and a white blade.

"Do not kill!? At any rate, get inside"

"I already don't have a seat... crowded"

"That is correct in regards to the back seat but there's the passenger seat"

"There.....the death rate is the highest"

"Oh, you were secretly worried"

Aoba murmured from the interior of the car.

"I understand. In that case, I will take the passenger seat and you can ride in the back"

""""Well then us too!""""

"How can you join!?"

"Natsuno-kun, I will take the front"

"No, I can't allow it after hearing that the death rate is the highest there. I'll ride up front"

"y, yea ok..."

When Aoba realized what she heard, her cheeks were dyed red. Just like that, Taiyou was worn out from the noise and hassles before even departing. In the end, once he got in the front passenger seat, the girls settled down in the back and they finally could start.

Kohaku's driving was quite comfortable. From the passenger's seat, the sight of a child sitting in the driver's seat was more uneasy than when watching from the outside, but once the car started moving, her driving was calmer than any other driver Taiyou had rode with. Even if you placed a cup on the dashboard, her calm driving made it seem like water would not spill out of it. Leaving the urban area and getting on the highway made the drive even calmer. Even though it was a family car minivan, it seemed as if he was riding in a luxury car such as a limousine. Although he was riding in it, it did not feel like it was moving.

"You're used to driving I see"

"Do not look down on a veteran beautiful girl. There was a time when I was often driving around like this jya"

"You were driving around?"

"That's right. I would wander around here and there while driving and traveling around Japan jya"

"In the car? You slept in the car?"

"What did you do at night?"

"Also how about a bath among other things?"

"It was something like a motor home which had a bed and there was also a simple shower. There were enough equipment and amenities that it was not an inconvenience when I was on a journey. It was a moving 1k travel studio jya"

"Really? That's pretty cool. Riding a car and going around Japan"

""Does that car still exist!?"""

The three sisters' voices matched each other and their eyes seemed to be expecting something.

"It's still in my possession because I usually don't use it since I've stayed in the suburbs"

"Really? Then, let's ride it next time"

"Let's travel with everyone"

"Aoba as well"

Right after that, Kazane turned towards Aoba with pleading eyes. Aoba nodded nervously. Although they felt a bit reserved and there was a wall around the new girlfriend, Kazane and the three sisters were aggressively and positively trying to close the distance. It was their dream from the start to make a harem so they wanted to become friends with everyone. Thus, they immediately had a feeling of wanting to get along with Aoba.

Furthermore, they also invited Shirokiyami to this trip. The next morning once the storm had passed, as Shirokiyami was saying that she should leave, they forced her to accompany them against her will. When she felt doubt about why

they invited her, they explained that considering she would most likely be there in the future, they might as well get along now.

The three of them all believed that Taiyou would without a doubt; win Shirokiyami’s heart sooner or later. Because the three of them had such an idea, there was chatter and laughter amongst the girls along the way. By the time they arrived at the hot spring resort, Shirokiyami and Aoba had somehow or another completely opened their hearts.

Chapter 92: Homeless Child / Scented Afterimage

In the afternoon. The Natsuno family plus one came to a historical inn at a hot spring resort. Located in the mountains in the north, beyond the prefectural border.

It was clear that it was a very familiar place for Kohaku. This was because of the fact that they went straight to the inn without any hesitation in regards to directions after getting off the exit and the pleasant interaction of the hostess who greeted them at the main building when they arrived. Guided by the hostess, Taiyou and the others were not guided to the main building but rather to a detached house on the premises. All the rooms in the building were Japanese style rooms. It had the atmosphere that suggested there was an amazing writer who wore a kimono here decades ago.

When Kotone, Suzune, and Kazane stepped foot into the building, they became very excited. They opened all the sliding doors, checked the rooms, and admired the garden which could be seen from the banquet room. Although not as obvious as the three sisters, Aoba secretly had sparkingly eyes as well. Noticing Aoba who they had become friends with in the car, they pulled her hands and all four of them went to explore the inside of the inn. After watching them leave, Kohaku suddenly let out a deep breath.

"Well, I will rest a bit jya"

"Rest?"

"Yea, I guess I'm tired from the long drive jya. I will only take a little nap. With that said, Danna-sama?"

"Yeah?"

"Would you sing a lullaby?"

"If would you like, we can sleep together as well"

While joking, Taiyou entered the bedroom and laid out futons for Kohaku.

"Would merely sleeping together be enough?"

Kohaku who came in late was being mischievous and had a small demonic smile.

Provocation, temptation, and teasing.

It was an attractive smile that encompassed them all at the same time. At least for Taiyou, it made him feel like pushing her down on the futon right then and there.

"What if I decline?"

"A veteran beautiful girl's reputation would be tarnished jya"

Kohaku smiled gracefully, but her ridiculing face increased.

"We also have a rare audience so I'm in high spirits jya"

"Audience? — Ah!"

Immediately after doubting Kohaku's words, Taiyou saw Shirokiyami's appearance.

"Greetings Spectator"

Because of the atmosphere of the Japanese house, standing behind the sliding doors gave her an ephemeral atmosphere. She also wasn't wearing her usual goth-loli fashion but a yukata, which gave her such an appearance and aura. Taiyou looked at her up and down and then became flustered. Since the three sisters and Aoba went out, and it was just him and Kohaku, it created a sensual atmosphere. However, there truly was a third party.

"T, this is—"

"It's ok. It's...ok. I under...stand"

"You understand?"

While listening to what he was saying, Shirokiyami took the coins on the low table, made an Ohineri by wrapping them in tissue, and threw them at him.

"I under...stand"

"What are you doing!?"

"You're certainly unfamiliar with it. It's a gift to throw at actors when you

want to honor them or when they do something amazing or exciting jya. Like a flower you give to an actress. What shall we do before she throws it?"

"What kind of advice are you giving!?"

"I understand.....I will do...it. Three.....two.....one"

"There is no need to continue doing it! We are not doing anything anymore!"

"You won't do it? Not even the lullaby jya?"

"Please refrain from saying such things with a grin!"

Taiyou retorted. The sensual mood from a little while ago had vanished. It really wasn't • • • remotely close to such feelings from earlier.

"I will take a little walk"

"Return before sunset jyazo—"

Taiyou left the detached house while Kohaku purposely spoke in a mother-like tone. Immediately after rushing out, Taiyou was a little irritated and said "good grief". The irritation he had vanished quickly after a short while however. The garden of the Japanese-style inn had plenty of summer grass. Because of the trees' shadows and the high elevation of the land, the neighborhood was cool. The wind that caressed his body occasionally while playing the sound of leaves was refreshing and helped him calm down.

"The air is delicious, it is really delicious"

"I....agree"

"Woah!"

He heard a voice that he did not expect. Turning to the direction of the voice, he saw Shirokiyami's appearance. It was the same as a few moments ago. Her ephemeral aura kept him from noticing just how long she had been there.

"Why are you here?"

"That person is.....sleeping. I came so I would not interrupt"

"I see"

Taiyou was convinced after what she said made logical sense.

"Even so, you were brought along somehow so is now ok?"

"Now?"

"Well, I think it is too late at this point, more or less"

"Well, for me.....it's ok, for the time be-ing"

"Really?"

"Besides.....the one who is followed has a tendency to be...challenged"

"I agree with that"

"Are we doing it.....now?"

She looked at up at him. She asked Taiyou with the such a beautiful face, that it gave him the feeling as if she was completely begging him. His heart tightened and throbbed. However, that feeling was from being overly optimistic and totally unrelated.

Taiyou clenched his fist tightly and through an upper-cut. It was a punch that could be described as scooping something from the ground. It made a "Buuuon" sound and cut open the air. If the punch were to hit iron bars or concrete, even they would be crushed flat. However, it did not connect with Shirokiyami. The punches were thrown with enough force that it felt like the blood vessels in his fingertips were bursting. Immediately afterwards, an ephemeral voice was heard from behind.

"Is it.....afterimage?"

"Why the question? Well, it was a slight afterimage but I saw it"

Taiyou turned around with a slightly bitter smile.

"That?"

"That is also an.....afterimage"

Once again, he heard a voice • • • • from behind him.

"Did I really see an afterimage?"

Taiyou turned towards the voice once again. Shirokiyami was in her original spot while standing with a nonchalant face. Her straight, long white hair that

spread along her smooth and slender back, fluttered in the wind. She was a beautiful woman who could be compared to a Peony

"What is it this time?"

".....afterimage"

"Well, it's strange that you can do such a thing"

"Is it permitted? That way.....even the bullets of a Gatling Gun.....won't work. It's better if I.....avoid them however"

"Isn't that beyond manslaughter! It's just you"

"Last...boss"

Shirokiyami pointed to herself.

"There really is a sense of you being the last boss. Do I have to win against such a person? Is it even possible?"

"Is it not...possible?"

This time, she bent her head slightly while asking. If the three sisters or Kohaku did that, he would have had sex with them immediately. Of course, he wanted to do it with Shirokiyami as well, but her overwhelming difference in abilities made it impossible.

Taiyou gazed at her and asked her a question with a serious look.

"I must win a fight in order for you to be my girlfriend right? Or are you telling me there is another way?"

"No, you need to conquer me..... and make me all messed up."

"Must I really mess you, is this some sort of set course meal?"

"The last part is my...service to you."

"I don't need service like that. Well that's that. If that's the case, it's hopeless I can beat you."

"Are you saying you give up.....?"

"No"

Taiyou declared to her clearly and suddenly. She was slightly surprised

because he interrupted what she was saying.

"Since I've decided that I won't give up on you, I'll find my own way to beat you by any means necessary"

"You seriously.....will go that...far"

"I seriously will go that far"

He repeated the same words, started walking, and then stopped.

The sunlight leaked through the leaves and the cool wind once again caressed the body. The slightly depressing feeling that he felt from the overwhelming difference in ability returned.

"I understand"

Shirokiyami nodded and walked next to him.

However, somehow or another, Taiyou felt that he did not have any animosity. He thought that that was just how things were for now.

"If you're serious.....then I will be serious...too"

"huh?"

"The next time...I will be serious"

"Have you ever been serious?"

"Out of 100%.....I will give 100%"

"If you think calmly, that's just 100%!"

"It means I will be.....serious"

"I know! I know but"

".....Is it better for you to...quit?"

"No, if you're serious then I will be serious as well"

Taiyou responded immediately.

"I feel that it's useless to go easy on you if I want to beat you"

"Yeah, I understand"

"On the other hand, when I do defeat the serious you.....you understand"

right? "

"I understand..... I will give you my soul and all of...me"

"By the way, what happens when you give 100%?"

"Catchball"

"Huh?"

"I can play catch.....with my after...image. However, I don't throw it back.....it looks bor-ing"

"Seriously!? You can throw and catch a ball with yourself?"

"You don't have...a dad"

"No I have a dad! or should I say, he exists"

"Well.....I'm feeling a presence"

"Presence? Can you sense people's presence or something?"

"Yeah, for example"

"For example?"

"Ponytail is now...quarreling with a...man?"

"eh?"

Chapter 93: Homeless Child/ Extreme Wall Slam

Miyagi Aoba was alone outside of a shop by herself.

A winery located about 5 minutes on foot from the inn. It's a nice spot that visitors surely drop by when visiting this place.

Originally, while walking and chatting with three sisters, they said they found the store while looking for a souvenir to give Kohaku. They invited Aoba to the store but she refused. Because of a constitutional problem, just smelling the scent of alcohol made her become tipsy. She realized she was someone who could never drink. After explaining that, she sent the three sisters inside the shop, and waited outside.

"Which reminds me, none of us can drink....."

There was no bench outside the shop, so she thought about such a thing while leaning on the wall. As far as she knew, it seemed that neither her father nor three mothers could handle alcohol as well. Even though Atsuko surely had the nature of a heavy drinker, all she could handle was one bottle of beer, which made her hop off the walls crazily.

"I wonder if my new mom can drink.....but I doubt she can"

Aoba restrained a chuckle. She figured she might as well try to buy a bottle of wine for her parents in order to make fun of them. Even though she thought about her parents, she also considered about how the age of the person who will become her fourth mother would not be unusual. The thoughts made her not as depressed as before. On the contrary it even made her feel happy.

"It's all thanks to Natsuno-kun, right?" She thought aloud, being clearly aware of that fact.

She accidentally peaked inside the store a bit through the glass and caught glimpse of the three sisters.

Immediately after she began to live with Taiyou, she heard stories about how he would eventually make seven wives. Also, she heard from Taiyou that even though the three sisters were triplets, they considered themselves one person.

In other words, nine women would eventually be with Taiyou. That was three times the amount as in her parents' home! Even when the fourth mother comes, that's still less than half.

Taiyou promised Aoba that in the Natsuno family, their children will know who their true parents are. A promise and an overwhelming harem that exceeded her parents. With the two things combined, Aoba started to think that she did not care about her troubles. That calmness also appeared on her face. Until now, she was a flower bud that was tightly shut but now she was in full bloom and seeping with love.

To say in a few words, she was attractive. One could even say that she was as pretty as Ms. Japan. Unfortunately, a bad bug was wandering around and drawn to the flower bud before it could blossom.

"Hey, I was looking at you for some time now, you alone?"

"Eh?"

When Aoba shifted her attention to who greeted her, there was a boy standing there. He had a hairstyle that was cut short on the sides and raised on the top. His clothes were very loose and his only appeal was that he looked a bit different from everyone else.

The boy was surely the same age as Aoba. Puzzled, she asked him another question.

"Are you talking to me?"

"That's right, you"

".....you"

Aoba raised her eyebrow and scowled as she repeated and carefully examined the way he addressed her. Without sensing the discomfort oozing out of Aoba, he spoke to her more.

"You're alone right? You free right now?"

"I'm not alone and I'm not free"

Aoba realized that he was probably some sort of smooth talker. She spoke bluntly and implicitly rejected him.

"Is that so. Do you know where the station is?"

"Eh? Station?"

"Yea, the station"

The boy gave a large nod. Aoba was suddenly confused.

"The station.....it certainly seemed like it was that way....."

"That way? From here?"

"Yeah, if you go downhill, you should see it if you turn at the restaurant "

"The noodle restaurant? Have you ever eaten there? Is it delicious?"

"No, it's my first time coming here"

"Is that so. In that case, do you like soba itself? I like it. Everyone loves udon in my prefecture, but I enjoy both soba noodles and udon noodles. You?"

"Um.....Udon...too"

Before she knew it, Aoba was having a conversation with the boy. A conversation was formed while she was answering his series of trivial questions. Anyone would answer each question one by one if they were caught up in the pace. By the time someone thought that it shouldn't go on, it was already too late.

Questions flew from the boy one after another. Engulfed by the situation, she could no longer resist, and started to go along with his conversation. She thought to herself "This is worthless" but since his first introduction, he was blatantly not addressing what Aoba said earlier about not being free. By no means could she say "I don't know so get away from me" in regards to the question "What direction is the train station in?" Aoba was not a woman who could go to that extent.

In the meantime, she felt that the boy was rapidly getting closer to her. She wondered if he was physically getting closer to her or if it was actually in her head. Or was it both? Aoba could not distinguish between the two because she was unconsciously being engulfed in his conversation.

(.....Natsuno-kun)

As she was being cornered, she tightly shut her eyes and called the name of the man in her heart.

——Don!

The wall behind her shook with a sound. Surprised, she opened her eyes and the figure of the very boy she called out to was standing in front of her.

Natsuno Taiyou. He forced his way in between Aoba and the smooth-talking boy and stood in front of her. In the process of protecting Aoba's entire body that way, he unconsciously hit the wall she was leaning against.

"Natsuno-kun!"

"Huh? Who are you?"

"Beat it!"

Taiyou unilaterally said that phrase as if to declare that he would not give the guy a chance to speak. In addition to the smooth-talking boy rebelling, his facial expression became angry. It was the first time he had another expression other than a smile.

"C'mon! I'm not beating it. I'm not afraid of you!"

The smooth-talking boy charged at him but Taiyou grabbed his chin with the hand that wasn't slammed into the wall. He raised the boy with his fingertips like a vice. The boy's feet kicked the air as he struggled to get free.

Seeing the boy's face turn bright red from his blood rising, Taiyou let him go, however the boy failed to land correctly and landed on his back.

"There won't be a next time"

Taiyou said while looking down at him.

Taiyou's threat and the unmatched overwhelming power were made clear. The boy looked frightened, tucked his tail between his legs, and ran away. Taiyou turned to Aoba after seeing the boy's appearance vanish.

"Are you ok?"

"Y, yeah"

"I see. Well, I heard you were caught up in something so I came as fast as I

could. I'm glad I made it in time"

".....you"

Before his eyes, Aoba was pondering the word with a meaningful expression and he was wondering what was going through her head.

"Huh?"

"No, nothing. Thank you Natsuno-kun"

"No, I'm sorry I was late. I wish I had ran faster"

"No, you still came..... So I'm happy"

Aoba said and smiled with narrowed eyes. There was passion in the word of "happy". Taiyou who heard it felt his heart beating. It was a word said by an extremely beautiful girl named Aoba. A beautiful girl who he had fallen in love with.

It was different from the genuine words "I love you" and "I like you", but it had the same destructive power as them. It can be said that Taiyou would do anything if it would make Aoba happy. He felt that he would even split the world in two if he needed to, just to see her smile.

They stared at each other and let their faces approach each other gradually. Soon their lips were touching.....

"Hey—"

"Woah!"

"Hiyan!!"

The two of them noticed Shirokiyami staring motionlessly at them while standing beside them. She had been staring at them with her trademark unimpressed expression for who knows how long.

"W...what's the matter?"

"Nothing... I brought you.....here"

"A...ah. That's right. Thank you. It would have become a major incident if you did not tell me."

Taiyou said that and meant it. He truly appreciated Shirokiyami. Thanks to her informing him, Taiyou knew exactly where Aoba was being confronted. Of course he wanted to thank her but he was secretly thinking about a much better way to show his gratitude.

"Even though I told you.....it still became a major...incident"

"Huh?"

"Dynamic.....Wall Slam"

"Eh?"

"Eh!?"

Shirokiyami pointed. Taiyou and Aoba turned their eyes and were both shocked at the same time.

Somehow, the wall that Aoba had her back against had cracks spreading out in a linear pattern, from when Taiyou slammed it like a sumo wrestler.

"Double meaning.....Wall Slam"

"No, well....."

"I will perform the.....Wall Slam as...well"

While saying that, Shirokiyami was hitting the wall which made a cute “pechi pechi” sound.

Taiyou and Aoba smiled bitterly at the same time while staring at the wall.

Chapter 94: Homeless Child/ Veteran Beautiful Girl

A stand-alone house covered under the veil of darkness. The chirping of summer insects and sound of water-filled bamboo sticks clacking against a stone rhythmically sounded in the background. Furthermore, there was a lovely sight to behold as many glamorous girls wearing yukata's surrounded him.

Taiyou's brides were all changed into yukatas. The three sisters were wearing three different colors of red, blue and yellow respectively. Aoba was wearing green and Kohaku was wearing a light blue yukata. It was a multi-colored arrangement and each of these girls had their own cute looking points. Since Taiyou left to change his clothes, the beautiful lady's had been having a pleasant chat with each other.

On the other hand, Shirokiyami who was not part of his bride group wore her trade mark goth loli fashion clothing. Perhaps she really liked wearing these types of clothes, or perhaps she just disliked wearing a yukata, but ever since the girls came out of the hot spring, she remained in her usual style of clothing.

"Aren't you going to change into a yukata?"

"I'm good.... for now"

"For now?"

"Differenti-ation."

"Is that so?"

While it was a small movement, Taiyou nodded his head. Although she wasn't saying very many words, he was still able to understand what she wanted to say. Because all of his brides were wearing the yukata right now she didn't want to wear it, if he wanted to force her to wear it Taiyou had to defeat her in combat, that's the kind of thing she implied.

Hearing her words made Taiyou a little glad.

"Why are you.....smiling?"

"Cause I'm happy."

"You're happy?"

"Ahh, after all your words from before means that you are seriously considering my proposal, right? At the very least I understood it as you keeping your promise."

"That's true.... however."

"However?"

"I always say that to everyone I meet. If they want me..... they need to defeat me."

"Is that so....."

Taiyou was slightly discouraged. Although it didn't change the fact that he needed to beat her, hearing that any male could step up to the challenge made him feel a pang of loneliness for a moment.

".....B-ut"

"Hmm?"

Once again, she spoke in her peculiar manner in accordance with her unique breathing patterns. When he wonders what she was going to say next and looked at her, he couldn't see the expression on her face as she was looking towards the garden.

"I wouldn't..... go to the..... hot spring with just any one."

"Is that true?"

"It's only cause..... I don't have to worry about being attacked."

"Even if that's the case, I'm happy."

Even though she told him that she went along with him because she wasn't afraid he would "attack" her, he still felt that this made him somewhat special as opposed to other men.

"Therefore, make sure.... you don't misunderstand."

"Yeah, I won't."

Taiyou shows a forced smile. Well the feeling that he was special was only a

hunch he had after all. In order to be truly “special” in her eyes, Taiyou realized once again that he needed to be able to overpower her in combat. Remembering the show of strength, she showed previously, he noted that there will be plenty of future troubles for him to face.

(Well, I can only try my best)

Once again he strengthened the resolve in his own mind.

"Husband, just what are you doing standing over there jya? are you going to neglect your cute brides and flirt with another woman?"

"What were you speaking about with that person?"

Both Kohaku and Aoba came towards Taiyou. Unlike Kohaku who was talking to him in a jesting and playful manner, Aoba's words were slightly mixed with jealousy.

"Just a little something."

"I don't understand what you mean by a “little something” jya."

"It's about the fact that he wants to defeat me..... and viol....ate me one day."

"Ohh!"

"Ehhhhhhhh?!"

"No that's just an exaggeration! And moreover, Kohaku-san why do you seem happy instead?!"

"Uuuuu..... to think that my husband would grow up into such a bold gentleman, I'm so happy that tears are coming out of my eyes jya."

Kohaku was pretending to cry showing her crocodile tears.

"I'm telling you that your response is weird, moreover your response is not suited as a bride, it's more like you are acting like some sort of delicate mother."

"Hikaru Genji was one of the men who aimed for veteran beautiful girls so it kinda suits your role jya."

"Please don't try to force me into such a thing, moreover what is a veteran

beautiful girl?"

"When a girl is 70 years of age and yet she is still beautiful, wouldn't she be considered a veteran jya? Although, even if you were to play professional baseball until you were 50 years of age, you would still be considered a rookie."

"I see, Kohaku-san is really at that age isn't she?"

The newcomer Aoba shows a surprised face as she heard Kohaku's age.

"That's right, I'm the beautiful veteran girl Kohaku-tan jya"

Kohaku stuck out her chest and spoke out proudly.

"Kohaku-tan..... if by some chance I lose, will you come to help...?"

"If by some chance..."

Taiyou smiles bitterly.

".....The chances are about, 1 to 1,000,000....? "

"The probability fell! Or more like it fell way to much!"

"You can rely on me Yami, at that time I will be husbands assistant and make sure you thoroughly fall jya"

"Eh? You will help Natsuno-kun?"

"Okay, I'm counting....on you."

"Ehhhhhhhh? You're also fine with that?"

Aoba was shocked and seeing this Taiyou sighed with relief as he thought "Ahh, now that's a normal reaction".

Taiyou went for a walk with Aoba. The inn within the mountains showed a different type of scene during the day and Aoba was looking here and there with curiosity.

On the other hand, Taiyou was not too interested in the scenery.

Ever since he left with her on the walk, Taiyou was only concentrating on Aoba who seemed dazzling to him. Although he was frequently looking at her, when their eyes were about to meet he would also look away. The thing making him worry so much was Aoba's hand.

(I want to hold her hand)

It was a really junior high school like thought to have.

"This hot spring has quite the beautiful scenery within the mountains doesn't it? Have you ever been here before Natsuno-kun?"

"No..... this is my first time here."

"I see, this is also my first time. In the past I also went to a hot spring within the mountains along with my family and it was quite common for monkeys to appear. The monkeys were really friendly, look, it's kind of like how there are pigeons in the park, they aren't afraid of humans and they don't attack us either."

"Oh, I see."

"They were extremely cute, and also we were able to buy some of the monkey food which was being sold from a nearby store."

"You mean food like rice crackers?"

"Yeah, those kinds of snacks. Hmm, do you think some monkeys will appear in this mountain?"

"Perhaps."

Chiming in the conversation, he continued to walk together with her.

Taiyou wasn't even the slightest bit interested in monkeys. The only thing in his mind right now was, how he was going to be able to connect his hands together with Aoba.

If he was just to ask her permission straightforwardly, although she may be embarrassed she would likely agree to such a request. If she was the three sisters or Kohaku, he probably wouldn't have hesitated doing such a thing. The three sisters were also his classmates but since the beginning they had already confessed straight up to him. In Kohaku's case the first time they met, they met with a kiss and then after that she always held goodwill towards him.

Comparing to the other girls, Aoba started off hating Taiyou. Since the time she left her home, furthermore, there was a period in their relationship that was worse than just being classmates and this continued for quite a long time

before the settlement of her family issue.

Therefore, even though they had already confessed to each other saying they want to be together for a long time, there was still many things that Taiyou couldn't say to her upfront.

(But that wouldn't be good of me, right?)

Thinking that the hesitation was unnecessary he became determined.

"H-Hey Aoba."

"What's wrong?"

"The thing is——"

"Geez! That again?"

Just when Taiyou was about to ask the question, he was interrupted by the hysteric voice of a woman from a long distance away. Because the girl spoke out with such a voice of indignation and anger it completely destroyed the atmosphere that Taiyou was setting up and Aoba's attention was attracted to the scene.

"I wonder what's wrong? Natsuno-kun, let's go and take a look."

"Y-Yeah."

Although he was discouraged by the fact that things did not proceed as planned, he realized that he wasn't going to be able to get a good mood again so quickly. Reluctantly he followed after Aoba.

The voice came from the direction of the inn. There was a large entryway and a Japanese style sliding paper-door that opened widely. On the inside of the room, there was multitudes of people in what appears to be a banquet.

Although there were some low tables lined up and all types of cooking on top of the tables, near one of the tables was a waitress with a resentful face looking down on the table.

"What's wrong?"

"The customer..... Kohaku-sama. No, there's nothing wrong."

He was curious as to the unique way Kohaku's name was called with the

“sama” attached to the end of her name, but even more so, he was curious as to what was going on near that table. On top of the table, there was food lined up and only one person’s portion was eaten.

"This is?"

When he asked a question, the waitress answered him with a face of resignation.

"It was stolen."

"What was stolen?"

"Yes, I was just going off to prepare for the cooking and when I took my eyes off for an instant, it was gone. Recently, this kind of thing occurs quite frequently."

"You mean by some monkeys or something?"

Aoba asks.

"I don’t know, we never see who actually steals the food. But I don’t think it’s monkeys, if it was the food would also be scattered across the floor."

"Certainly, it would be strange if they only purposefully took a person’s portion of food away."

Looking at the state the table was in one more time, Taiyou was convinced it wasn’t a monkey. Just like he said, the only thing gone was a single person’s portion of food. The food right next to it wasn’t touched in the slightest, it was unlikely that any type of animal did this and it seemed like a person’s doing.

"Do you have any camera’s used as surveillance?"

"We regard the customers privacy highly, besides this inn doesn’t have such a thing installed in the premises because it may ruin the scenery...."

"Ahh, I see, so you don’t want to spoil the elegance of the building."

This was something he could understand. If you knew the background of this place, this was an inn with nearly 100 years of history behind it. If they set up camera’s here and there to keep a close eye on the customers, it wouldn’t really reflect well on their inn’s reputation.

"I'm very sorry, I will go back to the kitchen and prepare another meal in a rush."

After saying that the waitress rushes away with half a run. Taiyou was alternating looks between the dishes on the table and the waitress who left to the kitchen.

Chapter 95: Homeless Child/ The Ghost Girl

"What's wrong Natsuno-kun?"

"I'm worried"

"About?"

"No matter how you see it, this only occurs after someone eats it."

"Yeah, I think so too. Specifically, one person's portion is gone and they even used the wooden chopsticks"

Aoba answers and the wooden chopsticks... that were split up were broken off badly and was of different lengths.

"So I heard from the waitress that this kind of thing happens "quite often recently". But this is a tourist destination, don't you think it's weird?"

"I see, nearly all of the guests here are only staying at the inn briefly."

"Yes, it's hard to say just how long each guest stays in the inn, but normally tourist don't stay over for such a lengthy period."

"That's true, I also thought the same."

"Even though this has occurred for quite the long period, they still haven't searched for the culprit. Furthermore, there hasn't been anyone in particular that declared they hold a grudge against this inn."

"Indeed..... This is a little mysterious. Natsuno-kun, are you bothered by it?"

"Yeah."

Taiyou nodded.

Normally, this kind of thing is not something he would be concerned about, but for some reason this caught his attention.

Even if you asked him the reason for it, he wouldn't be able to answer very well. Still, even though that may be, he was interested in how the food was eaten.

"I understand, then let's look for the culprit."

"Eh?"

"You're bothered by it right?"

"That's true but..."

"Then let's look for them."

Aoba was being proactive and Taiyou agreed to her suggestion.

Though he's started to feel this way for the past several days now, he felt like Aoba was much more cheerful in mood than when she first met him. She barely gets angry or depressed and differing from the first impression he had of her, she was actually a very lively and beautiful girl.

"Though in saying this, how are we going to find the culprit? I don't think that they would purposefully leave breadcrumbs or footprints pointing to where they were hiding..."

"That's true."

The two of them looked around their surroundings and found that there weren't any easy clues.

"Then let's start by gathering information, perhaps we may be able to understand somethings after."

"Alright, I guess it's better than doing nothing."

"There's no need to do that desuyo~"

When the two of them were about to walk away, Hera showed up from thin air. It's been awhile since she last appeared so Taiyou went "Ohh" as he saw her.

"You were here?"

"That's so mean of you desu~!"

Hera pushed up both her hands as she protested.

"Ahh my bad, it's cause I couldn't see you all this time, so I assumed that you were staying back at home."

"I wouldn't do such a thing. Besides, even if I was at home, Taiyou-chan and I

are barrier-free nanodesu. No matter where Taiyou-chan is, I can immediately appear before him."

"I remember you telling me that before."

"Yes nanodesu, I exist for Taiyou-chan desu~"

"I've also heard that before" he didn't say this thought out loud and instead asked about the first thing she said when she appeared.

"What do you mean when you said that "there's no need"?"

"I know who the culprit is desuyo. I saw them after all."

"Over here nanodesu."

Being led by Hera, both Taiyou and Aoba arrived to this particular building. It was a building that was about 10 minutes away from the establishment and it seemed to be deserted. Completely different from the Japanese style inn they were in before, this building had its own atmosphere. It was like a house that someone lived in before but is now gone from this place, or the kind of place that kids made into their secret basement, or the type of place to be used as a test of courage by the neighborhood kids in a summer night, the building had that kind of atmosphere.

"Is the culprit in here?"

"Yes desu."

"Na-Natsuno-kun....."

Aoba who was very high-spirited moments ago was now tightly grabbing on to the cuff of Taiyou's clothes. Her voice was trembling and it was obvious that she was frightened because of the atmosphere. It was the same way she reacted when the typhoon occurred just yesterday, but could it be that she was also afraid of the dark? Is what Taiyou thought to himself.

Seeing her like this, Taiyou naturally moved in to tightly hold on to her hand.

"I'm holding your hand, so it's okay"

"Un..... Thank you."

Aoba nods and squeezes back in return. After putting it to his mind that his

top priority was to defend her if something were to happen, they both set foot inside of the building.

"Taiyou-chan, Taiyou-chan~"

"What is it?"

"Please wait here for a moment desu."

Why? Just when he wanted to ask her this, Hera already flew inside of the building. He didn't understand the reason but he had no choice but to reluctantly wait there.

Before a minute passes, Hera had already warped right in front of him.

"I found them, they are in the same place as before."

"Where is that?"

"It is in the building around the side, inside the storage room desuyo~"

Hearing this Taiyou nods, silently looking towards Aoba he maintained his grasp and walked together with her. Making sure to keep quiet as they advanced through a garden that was overgrown with weed, they went around the side of the building. When they did they found this prefab type storage room.

Taiyou silently looks at the storage room and after that looked to Hera for confirmation.

"Yes desu, that's the place desuyo~"

Hera was talking normally and only Taiyou and the person he kisses can see her figure.

Taiyou nods and he heads to the storage room with Aoba. Unexpectedly his foot steps on a tree branch that dropped next to his feet.

a snapping sound resounded and the storage room shook as if in reaction to the sound.

In the next moment——— The door of the storage room opens and someone from inside comes jumping out. The other party was agile and catches Taiyou off guard, however...

(Compared with Shirokiyami this is...)

He had enough surplus time to even think of this sentence in his own head. Comparing it to Shirokiyami who was able to leave afterimages from both the left and right, this person didn't even seem like they were moving.

Taiyou extends his free hand and tries to catch the culprit. However,
——Squish.

This kind of sound effect resounded in his own brain. A soft feeling gets transmitted into the palm of his hand that tried to reach out to the culprit.

"Kyaah!"

The moment he understood what it was that he felt in his hand, a piercing scream in the night sky that seemed like it was going to tear silk apart resound.

"Sorry, sorry, I'm sorry, sorry."

Returning to the inn, he bowed his head to the girl who was now in his room alone with him over and over again.

From her looks she seemed to be quite a young girl and it was likely that she was close in age to Taiyou's group, she seemed to either be in junior high or perhaps a high school student. She easily exceeded a height of 160 cm and she was a tall kind of girl. Furthermore, the reason she screamed so loud just before is because she boasted an overwhelmingly large breast size. He had never seen this type of huge breasted girl before.

"Ahh no, if you apologize so much, I will feel bad going home."

"You grabbed her boobies real good after all desuyone~"

"Please stay quiet in front of others."

"Eh?"

When he suddenly swatted Hera who appeared suddenly in front of him, the girl was staring at him confused.

"Ahh, no nothing. More importantly, would you mind telling me your name?"

"Ah, Yes! My name is Pochi!"

".....Yes?"

"Ummm... Ah, yes. Mai neemu izu POCHI"

"No it's not about the language, moreover why did you speak your name so specifically the second time? "

"After all it's my name, so I'm used to saying it."

"Is that how it is....? No that doesn't really matter. Is that really... your name?"

Hesitating in calling this alluring girl by "that" name specifically, he wanted to clarify the matter.

"Yes! That is the name that my father gave me!"

"I see, for the time being let's leave it at that. I have this one thing I wanted to ask you however..."

"Umm, yes...?"

She looked despondent. It seemed like she could already guess what Taiyou was going to ask her.

Even though he started feeling guilty after seeing her like this, he still boldly opened his mouth and decided to ask her.

"Apparently there is someone who keeps eating the dishes in this inn without permission, is that perhaps your doing?"

"Yes... That's me. I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"....."

She keeps silent. Placing both her hands on her thighs, she purses her lips and looks downwards. Perhaps she didn't want to say why, or perhaps she couldn't say why. No matter what it is, she must have her own circumstances, is what Taiyou surmised.

"I see. By the way, let me change the topic a little, but are you still hungry?"

"Eh?"

"We are about to go eat dinner soon. If you are still hungry I thought, we

could prepare one more porti— —"

"My stomach is empty!"

She declared it as if her life depended on it. It was enough to make you think that she led a life of hardship.

"I understand, then I will tell them to prepare more dishes. In the meantime please stay here— —"

Saying that the triplets opened the sliding door and entered the room. Taiyou wanted to speak with his advisor so he left the room.

Outside was Kohaku, giving him a wink he headed outside to her direction. Before long they walked to a location that couldn't be heard by the people inside of the building, Kohaku then proceeded to stand to a halt and turned around to face him.

"Danna-sama."

The girl who talked to him was showing a strained smile. But it was hardly a laugh and it was more so filled with bitterness. When he saw such an unusual expression on her face, Taiyou thought something may have gone wrong.

After taking this Pochi girl home with him, Taiyou asked Kohaku to do an investigation on her background in private, so he deducted that her bitter expression is likely because of this fact.

"What's wrong, did you manage to find something out?"

"I investigated it in a hurry jya, therefore it may be a mistake but..."

"You aren't being articulate like usual, did something bad happen?"

"Rather than something bad... I would say it's like an unknown experience? No even though I know this kind of thing exists, it's an unpleasant knowledge jya."

"Unknown? Knowledge? I'm sorry, but can you say it in a simpler way?"

"I suppose so. First I will start with the conclusion.... That girl does not have a birth certificate to identify her jya."

"Eh?"

In a certain way. Saying this made her even more uncomfortable.

"She legally doesn't exist as a person, she's like a ghost girl jya."

Looking at the deserted house, Taiyou was astonished. After hearing this story, his face changed in a similar way to how Kohaku's looked right now.

Chapter 96: The Two Master's / Not a coincidence but inevitable

After leaving the eerie house and heading towards the main building. During that time, Kohaku did not utter a single word, she walked in a brisk pace as she led Taiyou.

Entering the main building, they passed by some of the waitresses along the way. Though the younger girls behaved themselves and lowered their heads just as they were supposed to act towards customers, the older women in this inn purposefully made way moving any luggage aside and giving Kohaku a deep and reverent bow.

Taiyou remembers the fact that a few hours ago one of the waitresses called her "Kohaku-sama", more so than he thought, he felt that Kohaku had quite a deep connection with this inn.

He wondered what had happened in the past and as he thought about these types of things, he was being led deeper into the inn. Eventually they ended in front of a heavy well-made door, the doorknob was twisted slowly and Taiyou was sent in the room.

Kohaku doesn't enter and stands beside the entrance of the door.

"Wait in here for a while jya."

"Kohaku-san?"

"I've called on someone who has a better understanding about these type of things jya. I also want to hear about it in more detail from them nojya."

"Is that so?"

"Well then see you soon."

Kohaku spoke in a more mature way than usual as she shut the door and left Taiyou inside the room.

Taiyou sighed as he saw her close the door and began to look around the room.

The room had a table that had a plate saying “living room”, there was also a fine looking carpet that made no sound even when it was stepped on. Lastly there was also a high quality sofa that your body could sink into. This location was in the most interior portion of the main building and the usual hotel guests were not allowed entry into this place.

Taiyou was left alone in this room so for the time being he sat on the sofa and looked all over the room. It was likely that this room was created to entertain guests that were planning on doing business, but there was no other characteristic to the room other than it having high quality goods so Taiyou got bored very quickly.

As he was thinking about what to do until Kohaku returned, he saw this square note-pad along with a good ballpoint pen on top of the table. After looking at it for a while, he took the pen and paper into his hands.

On it, he started to write the names of his girls.

Aoba.

Suzune, Kazane and Kotone.

Kohaku.

And lastly, Shirokiyami.

From top to bottom, he wrote each of their name full of feelings. While thinking about their appearances in his own mind, he wrote their names

They were now the names of women who lived within his heart.

Miyagi Aoba.

Having long hair and a straight pony-tail, she had a bright smile and was an attractive young girl. Her figure was delicate and slim, she had a moderately sized chest and a beautiful pair of female legs that had its own charm to them.

When they first met each other, she disliked him and called him a cheater, but that was because she was in a special type of family relationship where she had three different mothers, not only that a fourth mother was about to join her family as well. Above all, she lived her life without being informed of who her real mother was and she continued not knowing about them even until now.

After confronting her deepest issues together with Taiyou as her support, she vowed to never let her own children experience the same fears and worries she experienced and ended up living together with Taiyou.

Right now they haven't moved past the kissing stage, but she was a woman who clearly had feelings towards Taiyou.

The three Hayakawa sisters. Suzune, Kazane, Kotone.

They were born on the same day by the same mother, even their genes were the same, they were identical triplets. Even though they had the same face, for some reason or other their sizes and height of each were in three different stages. Kotone had a body appropriate for her age, she seemed to be an ordinary high school student, Suzune is half a head shorter and was more like a junior high student, whereas Kazane was almost the same size as elementary students.

If the three of them were standing side by side, you would think they were the same girl in different stages of their life, almost like a before and after picture. These girls recognize themselves as one person even though they are triplets and since they were a child they had already planned to live together with one man. This thought strengthened as they grew up and it changed into a desire to have a harem with themselves being part of it.

And finally they met up with Taiyou and the girls were now living under the Natsuno household as his trustworthy housewives.

Azumaya Kohaku.

Her outward appearance was even more like a child even when compared to the childish looking Kazane, Kohaku's height was at 130 centimetres. However, in reality she is a big senior in life that has lived for over eighty years. There are no lies when she calls herself a veteran beautiful girl, her cheeks were still plump and her hair was trimmed and shiny, her neck was still flawless and her physique had not changed for many years.

Her face always had a smile on it and she had a different kind of cheerfulness in comparison with Aoba..... It was the kind of smile that made you believe that she had lived her life and been to places.

She had a childish appearance yet her eyes had a depth and maturity to it. The reason behind all this is that she is one of the Eternally little, they are a group of girls who lives their whole life stuck in their 10-year-old body. Being unable to grow any further she lives the majority of her life in this form.

She was a young-old lady that had kept her body pure until she met with Taiyou, but since that one night she had given her purity over to Taiyou and began calling him “Husband” and would whisper this lovingly into his ears at every chance she got.

Shirokiyami.

Both the age and real name of this beautiful swordswoman is unknown. The color of her skin was as white as the snow and her white long hair reached the back of her knees and it reminded you of a silk thread. As if to add contrast to her look, she always wore this black gothic dress that covered her arms in a sleeve that had a bell-like shape. The dress had a skirt and she also wore a black over-knee socks that covered her leg.

She has a unique way of breathing and speaking, the expressions she showed were quite limited almost like a doll, but to contrast this, her eyes held a deep boundlessness and a strong light within them, no matter how you see it she was a very unbalanced beauty.

She was known as the strongest expert in the world and every time Taiyou met with her, he would issue her a challenge.

They made a promise with each other and she told him that if he could defeat her in a duel, she would become his woman. Since then Taiyou has continued to challenge her whenever they met.

Each time, this monochrome colored girl would wield her wooden scabbard against him and would repel his attacks.

Right now, he couldn't even reach her feet.

That's why his desire to win against her became even stronger.

Seeking her love, making this feeling grow, the crazy emotions were always swirling within his own mind.

Taiyou was writing the names of the girls one after another. It was the kind of conduct that you did in class, sort of like drawing scribbles in a notebook to pass the time. Writing the names of the girls he liked was a normal conduct for a boy in his puberty.

Inside of this room, you could only hear the sound of Taiyou's soft breathing and the scribbling of his pen.

The way he wrote the names side by side, almost made it seem like someone practicing to write kanji, but as he continued to write, none of the letters ever became messy nor written incorrectly.

Taiyou put his feelings at every stroke and dot, in order to write the names of the girls he so adored.

It was like he was given a treasure from the gods, no it was more like he was treating this as dealing with god. He wrote with reverence and respect.

Above all, he wrote their names with overflowing love.

He kept writing their names on the paper putting all his feelings into them.

One character at a name, he wrote the girls names, it felt like something was beginning to build up within his own mind.

Aoba.

Suzune.

Kazane.

Kotone.

Kohaku.

Shirokiyami.

There was no longer any misunderstandings. Each time he wrote their names down, he felt something accumulating within his heart.

Taiyou felt satisfied. He wanted to collect his feelings within his own mind and each time he wrote their names down like this, he reaffirmed the feelings he had for them.

It was like he was pouring liquid in a water jug. Or like the feeling of enriching

a dry earth with water.

Therefore, Taiyou continued to write. Pouring more of his feelings into it and wanting to feel even more satisfied, he wanted to fill his heart with all their love and beauty. While thinking in this way.

Gradually, he started to mutter out their names as well.

——Aoba. Suzune, Kazane, Kotone. Kohaku. Shirokiyami.

——Aoba. Suzune, Kazane, Kotone. Kohaku. Shirokiyami.

Thinking about them dearly, he kept writing their names.

Suddenly another names floats within his mind. After filling out many pages of the memo-pad he didn't write it down, but now that it came up in his mind, it was a name that didn't seem to disappear.

Taiyou's hand stopped writing. For a moment, he was about to write that name on paper.

Taiyou hesitated, did he have a right to write this name? Would it be alright to arrange her name amongst the women he so dearly loved?

He did not understand his own feelings, to begin with, he didn't even know why her name came out in the first place.

Therefore, Taiyou turned over the page on the memo pad. At the very least it would be separated from his list of names, just a trial he tried to write the name once on a brand new page.

"Yuri——"

Murmuring out at the same time, he wrote the first letter of her name and then ended with a horizontal line.

"Tereretetete~♪ Taiyou-chan has levelled up!"

In front of him, a fairy about thirty centimeters in length appeared out of nowhere.

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Chapter 97: The Two Master's / Over 100

The word that was stuck in Taiyou's head came to the surface. There is a certain word that was popularized among the Japanese people for a certain period of time.

That word was KY aka "people who cannot read the situation".

The behavior of the clueless fairy which magically appeared in front of him right now was the very consolidation of the word.

"You're amazing Taiyou-chan, with this you've managed to hit level 12 nanodesu~. What's even more amazing is that I did not even need to teach you the method to earn experience points, you've managed to find the method on your own!"

The totally clueless Hera looked at Taiyou and gave him a bright smile.

"As expected, Taiyou-chan is wonderful, you're the only one in one-hundred million nanodesu. Taiyou-chan is the only one I can be proud of."

"Oi."

"Alright, since there is nobody in the surrounding area, let me show you immediately the results of the level up. Taiyou-chan, there's something really surprising that's because— oops, Taiyou-chan has tried his best so I think it will be better to check it for yourself. "

Hera continued acting like she was deeply moved.

"Oi, you."

"With this, you are getting closer and closer to Yami-chan, right now it's probably at the level of a romantic fling, but one day a blooming romance will arise~"

"Listen to what I'm saying!"

Hera was just talking on and on to herself and Taiyou reached his limit and shouted out. And then a slapping sound resounded as Hera got slapped into the carpet.

"That hurt nanodesu! What are you doing Taiyou-chan! Are you having a male period or something?!"

"Listen to what people are saying! Or more like why did you suddenly appear here!"

"Eh? Well I mean you levelled up you know? I've even made sure that there was nobody in the surroundings just like you requested, but are you somehow unsatisfied Taiyou-chan?"

".....Level up."

"Yes, the thing Taiyou-chan was doing just now accumulated experience points and a level was gained as a result."

".....Are you talking about the writing of the girl's names on the memo-pad just now?"

"That's exactly right nanodesu!"

——Slap!

Hera is slapped one more time, this time she spins around and flies away towards the wall.

"What are you doing?!"

——Slap!

"Hang on a minute Taiyou-chan"

——Slap!

"What are you——"

——Slap!

"Stop it alre——"

——Slap!

"Calm down and listen to wha——"

——Slap !

"Did I do somethi——"

——Slap!

"Y-You meanie——"

——Slap !

Being smacked over and over again, Hera was finally in tears. Still every time she was dusted away, she still fluttered..... and unsteadily wandered back to where Taiyou was.

Looking at her in such a state, Taiyou felt a little better.

He always had the impression that the tasks that Hera had him do to level up were meaningless and useless tasks. She made him do things like stack up blocks and knock them down, dig up holes and fill it back up, turning a coin back and forth, these types of menial tasks....

At the very least, all the tasks he had to complete since now has been things like this, so it was kind of ingrained in him.

Moreover, even Hera has mentioned that these were repetitive “tasks”.

So he thought that raising his level was essentially repeating useless type of work.

But the thing he was doing just before was something he did not consider meaningless, it was the thing most distant from the word meaningless.

Writing the names of the girls he loved and confirming the feelings he had for them. At least he was getting some kind of satisfaction from doing the act.

Certainly when he considered it calmly, the fulfilment he earned from writing down their names in the note and the fulfilment he felt when doing the repetitive laborious work was similar (he did not want to admit that it was practically the same).

Nevertheless, the fact that the act led to his level up insinuated that it was a form of meaningless and useless work. From his point of view, getting angry was a natural thing.

"Uuu..... Taiyou-chan I felt a murderous intent desuyo."

However, when he thought about it calmly, Hera (probably) did nothing

particularly bad either. She was only acting faithfully based on her own instincts and she also kept her word to keep quiet when other people were around.

Not only that, when Taiyou was swatting her away, even though she was tearful she always seemed to come back to his side obediently.

Seeing her appearance like this, Taiyou felt a slight tinged of guilt.

"..... My bad"

"Eh?"

"I was really irritated before, but now I'm reflecting on it."

"Is that why you are speaking like this nanodesu~?"

"I'm being serious, that was my bad."

Saying this, Taiyou lowered his head towards Hera. Unable to anticipate this development in the slightest, Hera panicked a little.

"W-Wait a minute Taiyou-chan! What are you doing? Please raise your head~"

"I'm sorry, please forgive me."

"I understand desu, I will forgive you~. I'll forgive you to the extent of me trying to speak out very difficult kanji words! So you can raise your head now Taiyou-chan!"

"Is that so? Thank you."

Taiyou raises his head and seeing that Hera became relieved.

"Fuu, that was surprising desu."

"I'm truly sorry."

"It's alright, I only exist for your sake Taiyou-chan. I will do anything for Taiyou-chan, besides, it's alright for Taiyou-chan to do whatever he wants to me desuyo~"

"..... Thank you."

"Yes desu. Ufufu."

"What happened?"

"I'm sorry, it's just that I'm really happy when you said "thank you" desuyo~. If I can hear those words from you, I wouldn't even mind it if I kept being swatted until the very last ounces of my HP desu."

"The last ounces of your HP? Don't tell me, are you saying that you can actually be killed?"

"Yes desu. Didn't I tell you before Taiyou-chan? I can only be killed by you Taiyou-chan."

"Ahh, now that you mention it, I do remember hearing something like that from you. Was that really the truth?"

"I can not tell lies to Taiyou-chan desuyo~"

Hera speaks in a joyful manner. She always speaks in a roundabout way, but somehow the words she spoke just now had a completely different feel to Taiyou.

"Is that so? Well then, let me just recollect my thoughts and then would you mind showing me the results of the level up?"

"Yes desu, in that case, here it goes~"

As soon as Hera finished speaking, a torrent of numeric figures rushed through Taiyou's brain. Numbers he was used to seeing continued to flow through.

"Did agility finally exceed 30...? Eh, hasn't strength gone over 100?!"

"Yes desu, as expected of Taiyou-chan. Being at level 12 and having strength over 100, you are like a grizzly bear's senpai aren't cha~?"

"Isn't that a total balance breaker....."

Taiyou opened and closed his palms whilst looking at it. As Shirokiyami has pointed out, nothing really changed about his physical appearance and it did not seem like he was someone with any sort of overwhelming power.

"Should I try measuring my grip strength?"

"You can also do the bench press desu, I'm sure you will be able to lift more than 190 kilos~"

"I may even be able to become an assassin if that's the case."

"Isn't it a little different from that desuka? "

"Well I'm still the same person inside so it's alright."

"Oh, I see nanodesu~"

Exchanging a Hera-like conversation..... He was confirming his newfound abilities. Just how much more explosive can his strength be now that it's gotten up to this point was something that he wanted to test out sooner or later.

After a while, the door opened with a click.

Two women showed up from there. The first girl was the familiar young looking old lady and the other was a face he had seen for the first time.

The woman who came in after Kohaku was a female in her 50's and she was elegantly dressed in a tailored kimono. Her spine and backbone were still tensely upright, and she gave off this feeling of grace.

"I've kept you waiting nojya. Hanaeda, this is my husband jya."

The two women were standing in front of Taiyou and Kohaku was introducing him to the woman. Taiyou panics and stands up in a hurry, even though this was their first meeting, her appearance looked like an elderly person and because of this he bowed his head to show respect.

"Nice to meet you, I am Natsuno Taiyou."

"It's my pleasure, my name is Iwashiro Hanaeda. It is my honor to make your acquaintance. Please raise your head."

"Yes."

After saying this, the three people started to sit down. Taiyou sat at his former position, Kohaku sat by his side. Hanaeda sits on opposite side facing the two people.

"Oh?"

"Ah?"

The two women raise their voices at the same time. When he was confused at what occurred, he noticed that their gaze was gathered at the same spot.

The thing they were looking at was the memo Taiyou had written in just until a while ago. In it was the names of various women, naturally Kohaku's name was also in it.

"Just like Kohaku-sama has told me, he really does seem to love you from the bottom of his heart doesn't he?"

"Of course jya, if he wasn't such a man, I wouldn't go as far as to trust in him."

"I've started praising someone's spouse again."

"L-Leaving that aside."

Since he was deeply embarrassed by the topic, Taiyou hurriedly tried to change the topic.

"Did you say your name was Iwashiro-san? What kind of a relationship do you have with Kohaku-san? Since a little while ago, I noticed you've been calling her with the "sama" honorific."

"I am indebted to Kohaku-sama. Although it may be presumptuous of me to say this but, I feel as though I am like her daughter."

"Daughter...."

Murmuring out the word, he turns his gaze towards Kohaku who was next to him.

"Are you going to fancy another girl whilst your bride is right next to you, danna-sama? That's not allowed jya, Hanaeda is like my daughter, so it would be incest if you were to fancy her jya."

"No, that's not the cas—"

"I'm joking jya. The thing that I wanted to discuss with you along with Hanaeda is the main reason I have brought her here."

"The main reason..."

Having those words roll off the tip of his tongue, he turns his eyes towards Hanaeda. The woman was looking at Taiyou with a serious expression on her face.

"Then, let me talk about Pochi" She said.

Chapter 98: The Two Master's / The Girl without a Family Registry

"In saying that, where shall I begin I wonder....?"

Hanaeda's face changed to the color of confusion. She wasn't sure where to start and she had a concerned expression.

"In that case, would you mind if I asked you something I am curious about? First of all, the girl's name.... Why is she called Pochi?"

After confirming that Hanaeda agreed to his request, Taiyou asked the question he was most concerned about.

The name of the girl was without a doubt like the name of a pet dog, that's why he was curious about the answer.

"That is the girl's name."

"Her real name? You can't be saying that her real name is Pochi right? I don't think that the government office would accept a name like that——"

After saying that, he took a big breath of air. He suddenly remembered the thing he talked about with Kohaku minutes ago.

"That's true, the government office would not accept a name like that. To begin with, it was never reported to the government offices. I will also talk about the details surrounding this matter."

After Hanaeda says that she takes a small breath of air before beginning her story.

Fourteen years ago a woman came to a nearby mansion. The house did not have an owner living in it so the girl lived there as its new owner. That girl's name was Karina, after living in the mansion there was something similar to a family name plate that was hung on the door.

Nobody had seen the woman's appearance, after arriving at the mansion she closed herself inside and never showed herself in front of others. Every day all

the things she needed in her daily life were delivered to her house, only when a person by chance heard her voice on the intercom would they notice that she sounded like a young woman, however nobody really knew exactly what she looked like.

Before long, it was known that a strange person by the name of Karina lived in that house.

After several years passed, a young girl sometimes showed herself from the mansion. Either the woman brought the child with her when she first moved or she gave birth to the child in the mansion, that was how young the child looked. Even though the child was playing in the premises of the mansion, the woman named Karina was still only recognizable via the intercom phone system, she did not show her figure at all.

Years passed and the little girl gradually grew up. Even though she became of age to go to school, the girl stayed within the house premises and did not enter schooling. When a certain person visited her mansion to find out more about the circumstances, that person found out that the young girl called Karina as “Master” and that the young girl was named Pochi.

The person who visited the house suspected that the young girl must have been abused in the household. However, in the end, there was no intervention by the person.

That’s because there was no trace of abuse on Pochi’s body. Another thing is that even though Pochi calls her by “Master” but if you imagined her saying “Mother” instead, you could sense that they had a great mother-daughter type relationship.

In the end, there was no room for outside intervention and both Karina and Pochi kept living in the mansion.

Pochi doesn’t go out of her plot of land and she did not go to school, but apparently Karina seemed to have given her some education so she properly had knowledge taught to her. She talks to friendly and sociable people who walks past the mansion, so to the tourists around who did not know of her circumstances, she seemed like a home town girl who was a little clever.

On the other hand, Karina doesn’t show herself to the outside world and only

occasionally can her voice be heard.

And then another decade passes. On a certain fateful day, Karina disappeared from the mansion. Leaving only Pochi behind.

Ironically, just like the name she was given, Pochi continued to guard the mansion. As one would expect she would get hungry after a while, so she occasionally left the mansion to steal food at this inn.

Taiyou who had listened to the end of the long story was speechless. He had a few guesses here and there as to what may have occurred, but he never expected anything like this.

"That's as far as I know. Up to this point, everyone living around these parts knows this story. In a certain way, both Karina and Pochi have become celebrities of sorts."

"From here I shall take over. Pochi.....I heard most of the details from Hanaeda and I also relied on my intermediary sources to investigate further information. After doing that, I managed to uncover something surprising jya."

"Something surprising?"

"That's right, when that girl named Pochi was born, there was no birth certificate issued jya."

"No birth certificate created? Is such a thing even possible?"

"In itself the event isn't that rare, but for it to have been left in such a state for more than ten years is something that can be considered rare jya"

"Is that so?"

"From there I've thought about various things and I thought about the possibility that Karina and Pochi were real mother and daughter, but the investigations led to nothing jya."

"Why is that?"

"That's because Karina had already passed away, there was a public record of her death and testimonials from the hospital, not only that but her cremation was also recorded. It isn't possible to find out even with expert appraisal jya."

"Is that so? Karina and Pochi. Karina.....Kana?"

When he was saying out the name of the mother, he suddenly shifted the intonation of the mother's name and it became a different word.

"Have you noticed it, Danna-sama?"

Hearing this, Kohaku answered with a faint smile.

"That's exactly right, Karina was literally as it implied, a temporary name. Her real name was Suzuki Yuuko, once again, this was such a generic and ordinary name that it was difficult to get anything out of it jya."

"....."

Taiyou became even more speechless. The girl named Pochi just continued to become more and more enigmatic.

"In fact, I was surprised."

Hanaeda intervened the conversation.

"You were surprised?"

"Yes. That girl is a very good child. She often greets people courteously whenever they pass by the mansion, hmm, how do I put this, she is a really bright child very similar to you, Taiyou. If you exclude the fact that she doesn't go out of her mansion, she is a very lovely and good girl. Furthermore, she has the ability to sympathize with other people. Whenever I was in bad physical condition even if it was just slightly, she would notice it immediately and be worried about me."

"Is that how it is?"

"That's why, the moment that Karina-san passed away, I continued to care about that child and visited the residence. If it was necessary, I even thought to take her in as raise her as my own..... however"

"However?"

"That child does not want to go out of that mansion. As long as you pass through the mansion, that girl will remain very bright and tender as usual, but if you suggest or talk about her leaving the mansion, she will take a strong stance

and refuse any suggestions. It was not just towards me, anyone in the neighborhood that did the same was treated as such. Everyone around here is concerned for the girl, after all, she is a gentle soul that can provide people with peace of mind when they are in her presence"

"..... Therefore, whenever she stole any of the dishes, you would not make any big commotion out of it."

Hanaeda nods quietly.

"Because it wasn't possible to get her out of the mansion, I could do nothing but leave her alone. I once tried to forcibly remove her out of the residence, but at that time she acted enraged and struggled violently. That's why, I never would of thought that Pochi would leave that mansion."

"Hm? Wait a moment, whenever she went out to steal the food, hasn't she come out herself?"

"Yes, well she did come out, but that was all her going out by herself. Up until now, there has never been a time when that girl was taken out of the mansion by someone else."

"Ahh, so it was like that."

"Danna-sama, you are the first person to have accomplished this feat jyana."

"..... What does that mean?"

"I don't know. However, but if possible I would like to ask for a favor."

Hanaeda says this and quietly lowers her head.

"If it is possible, please take that child out from the mansion completely. I sincerely request it."

Even though Taiyou was at least two generations younger than herself, Hanaeda spoke with respect and sincerity. Seeing her head lowered down so deeply seemed to reflect her strong feelings towards Pochi and also how she regretted the fact that she was powerless in all of this.

After Hanaeda stood from her seat, only Taiyou and Kohaku remained within the room. Even though they were sitting next to each other, they did not create their sweet lovely dovey atmosphere.

That's because the both of them were thinking about the girl known as Pochi and neither of them were able to get into the mood.

Taiyou places his elbows on to his thigh and he had interlocked fingers that was placed under his chin whilst having this pensive look on his face.

"Danna-sama, what are you thinking about jya?"

".... I remember the story of how this girl grew up raised by wolves."

"It's the story of Amara and Kamara jyana?"

Taiyou did not even respond to indicate that he was paying attention to Kohaku, in this case the names did not matter to him. What mattered was that this girl named Pochi was in an environment and condition that was not very good.

"Danna-sama, when you went to the mansion, was there any particular place that felt off?"

"Hera."

Without directly answering Kohaku's question, he called out to Hera. As soon as Hanaeda came into the room, Hera erased her presence but the moment her name was called out, the little fairy warped herself in front of Taiyou's eyes again.

"Yes desu, did you call for me, Taiyou-chan?"

"When we went inside of the mansion previously, did you see inside of the building?"

"Yes, when I was looking around for Pochi-chan, I saw it desuyo."

"How was it, I went directly towards the storage room, so I did not see what it was like inside."

"Let's see..... it was like a children's room."

"A child's room?"

"Are you talking about that girls room?"

Both Taiyou and Kohaku were dubious.

"Yes, there was a small bed and lots of small sized clothing. In the other room, there was this picture book or children's toys. There was plenty of those type of things lying around desu."

"It seems that she was not being abused jyana."

"Ahh, according to Hanaeda-sana, she did not attend school, but she was seeminly properly educated."

"She seemed to have been cherished and she also received the proper education. She grew up to be a gentle girl that could understand a person's heart. However, she was taught not to leave her mansion and she was not given a family register."

"This is too odd, it almost seems like she was raised with such contradictions in her lifestyle on purpose."

"That may be true jyana. Hey, Danna-sama, shall we return, I would love to hear the story directly from that girl's perspective in person jya."

"That's right."

Taiyou nods and stands up, a few breaths later, Kohaku also stands up. The both of them heads towards the door and they leave the main building and went towards the place they were staying at.

"Ah! Taiyou-san!"

When he returned, only Kazane came out to greet him. She was looking around restlessly and after seeing Taiyou, she rushed over to him with a panicked expression on her face.

"What's wrong Kazane?"

"That girl, that girl ran away!"

"What did you say?!"

Chapter 99: The Two Master's / No Sound Level Up

Being Surprised, Taiyou looked towards the abandoned house. Hera flew in front of him and raises her hands in the form of a cross on top of her head.

Seeing this Kazane's already small shoulder became even more tiny.

"I'm so sorry! Taiyou-san was depending on me and yet I..."

"What on earth happened?"

"Y-Yes, well. After Taiyou-san and Kohaku-san went out, we talked about a variety of things to that girl, I thought that we should get along. At first she was responding very amiably, but she became stranger as we continued to talk."

"She became more strange?"

"In what kind of way jya?"

"Umm, she looked unsettled and began looking around left and right..... It was like she was searching for something."

"Looking for something..... Don't tell me she was looking for her mother?"

"I don't think she would still be looking for her at this stage... What happened after that jya?"

"Yes, after that she suddenly brought her face really close to our neck and sniffed as if she was smelling our scent..... After that it seemed that it wasn't what she was looking for, so she jumped out of the room and ran away."

"Hearing up to this point, it's almost like a dog has run away."

"It's true! Please believe me!"

"Ahh sorry, the way I worded that was quite bad. It's not like I am doubting you Kazane. There is also her name... and she just gives that kind of an impression."

"Ah.... I'm sorry."

Kazane was feeling despondent.

"And so, only you were waiting here for our return?"

"Yes! Aoba-san, Koto-chan and Suzu-chan all ran after her..... It would seem that neither Koto-chan nor Suzu-chan have found her yet."

"How are you able to tell..... Never mind, it must be your telepathy with each other."

After asking her the question, Taiyou remembered that the three triplet sisters shared a special connection that gave rise to a special telepathic ability.

"Taiyou-chan! I will also try to find her desu. If I find her, I will immediately come back to inform you desu!"

"I'm counting on you!"

Saying that, he bid the flying Hera farewell, then he proceeded to look right at Kohaku and asked her opinion on the matter.

"What do you think about this, Kohaku-san."

"Umu."

Kohaku nodded and then answers him with a serious look on her face.

"If it was just her running away then there wouldn't be too many issues, but I feel that the prior actions she took just before running away is something we need to be concerned about."

"Yeah. You said that she smelled you and then thought that you weren't the right one, is this correct?"

"Yes!"

Kazane nods in a big way.

"For one, that girl followed danna-sama but now she has run away."

"Yes, but why...."

"Perhaps, she was drawn in by danna-sama's smell?"

"No way."

"Naturally, danna-sama's scent would have been stuck to the three girls jya, that's why at first she was happy to be with them, but after a while she realized that it wasn't the same and so she ran away."

".....When it's all brought together in such a way, I kind of feel like it may actually be the case."

"U-Umm..... If that's the case then there is one more thing I'm worried about."

"What is it?"

"That girl, sniffed around our necks, but when she was sniffing my neck the number of times she did was a lot. Both Koto-chan and Suzu-chan only got one sniff each, but she sniffed my neck three times."

"At that time, did she say anything in particular?"

"No, nothing. Ah, she only said something to Koto-chan, but it was something that was whispered directly into her ears, I couldn't hear what she was saying."

"It makes me wonder what she actually said."

"Umu."

"Please wait a moment, let me go and ask Koto-chan!"

Saying this, Kazane ran into the building. Just as he was thinking about what she was going to do, moments later he saw her coming back towards him with a disappointed look on her face.

"I'm sorry..... Both Koto-chan and Suzu-chan left without their smartphones."

"Oh, you tried to call them by phone."

"I'm sorry..... Right now we are capable of sensing the rough situation and feelings of each other, but unlike in the past when we were kids, we are no longer able to communicate just via our hearts....."

"No, it is not something you need to apologize for."

"But....."

"It's alright."

Saying this Taiyou kneels on one knee and hugged her gently. Her little delicate body was something that seemed like it would break if you put in too much power.

Normally she would press her body into him even more but perhaps because

she felt tormented by her guilt she was just standing still, her body had become stiff standing upright.

Her face had looked like that since he had returned. Kazane felt guilty for the fact that Pochi escaped and it was clearly pointed out when looking at her face. After that she wanted to redeem the situation by getting into contact with Kotone but her sister didn't bring her phone with her and the telepathic communication was only working partly, so it only made her feel even worse.

Naturally, Taiyou had no intention of blaming her at all. After listening to what Hanaeda told him, it was in fact rather natural for Pochi to escape, besides there was no merit in blaming the girls for trying to immediately chase after Pochi nor was it reasonable to blame them just because their telepathy wasn't up to par.

However, she was blaming herself. Desperately wanting to console her feelings somehow, he was searching for the answer within his own head. After being stuck in his own mind restlessly thinking of something to say, a completely irrelevant topic came forth.

"The truth is, I actually levelled up a little while ago."

"Eh?"

The sound of wind flickers through them. She had a reaction of being startled at such a random comment. Even Kohaku who was standing on the side had a similar reaction.

"Is that true, danna-sama?"

"Ahh, if you check my ability you'll understand it immediately."

"Ah....."

"It's true jya. Since when....."

Taiyou gently releases his embrace and takes out a piece of paper from within his pocket.

Every single one of his women's names were written there. This was one of the pieces of paper that Taiyou had written on moments ago. When they were leaving the reception room he somehow put it inside of his pocket.

When he showed it to Kazane, she became increasingly puzzled.

"I was told to wait for someone by Kohaku-san, so whilst I had some free time I somehow started writing your names on the paper that was left on the table. At first it was just based on a whim that I just felt like writing all the names of the girls that I liked on the paper, but after doing this for some time, Hera suddenly appeared in front of me and announced that I had levelled up. I'm not sure how to put it but, it was a very unexpected coincidence."

"Fumu, I need to punish that little fairy later."

"Ahh, I've already done that before so, please just let her off."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

Kazane was unable to understand what Taiyou and Kohaku was talking about. It would seem that Kazane didn't understand the implications and essence of what levelling up was or what Hera normally required him to do.

"Well don't worry about it. What I wanted to say is that when I was writing your names down, I was constantly thinking about you girls. I thought about your names within my mind as I wrote them down."

"It's the thing you do when you write the names of the person you like down on to a note of paper isn't it? Back when I was still a school girl I didn't have anyone like that so I never did it, but what about you Kazane?"

"Eh? M-mme?"

"Oh? That cute manner of panicking, alright, I've decided jya, as soon as we get home, I will examine your textbooks and notes to confirm it!"

"Y-You cant!"

Seeing how flustered she became, could it be possible that she wrote another boy's name asides from Taiyou's name..... But that wouldn't be the case right? Although Kohaku did consider as a possibility for just a moment.

"Anyways, as I was writing it a thought crossed my mind. Aoba name's was one person. Kotone, Suzune and Kazane was two persons. Kohaku was three persons. and Shirokiyami was four persons."

After a while, Taiyou was smiling at Kazane....

"What's amazing was that when I was writing these names down I didn't realize it was anything to do with writing down the people I loved. But after I finished writing your names I finally realized that I had already fallen in love with all of you. Moreover, I felt that I lost my guilty conscience."

"You don't have to ever feel guilty about it!"

Kazane shouted out in a loud voice. This exchange has been done over and over again and at every occasion the three girls would clearly let out their opinions on the matter.

"Thank you, I also agree with you now. Therefore Kazane..."

Bending his knee so that he was able to be on the same eye level, Taiyou looked at Kazane straight in the eyes.

"I will be able to make your dreams come true soon. The dream of having a harem family together. Since the moment that my guilty conscience has gone away, I can now move forwards towards the goal without any hesitation in my heart."

"Is that true?!"

"Yeah. Or more like, this really is your dream isn't it? I didn't think you would respond so positively to this extent, even to reveal such a brilliant smile."

"Please don't joke around about this!"

"You're right. That's my bad just now, sorry. In saying that, I really hope for your continued cooperation in the future. So that I can face this with my fullest capabilities, so that I can have peace of mind, I need your three girls who I consider as the first wives' to provide me with their full support."

"Yes! If it's for Taiyou, we will do everything in our power. We will do everything we can do in order to create our dream family with Taiyou."

"Ahh, I'm counting on you."

Taiyou and Kazane, these two people were looking at each other face to face.

Looking into her resolute gaze, it was as if Taiyou was feeling her energy itself was flowing directly into him from her eyes.

It was the kind of emotion he felt when he was writing their names down on the piece of paper but even stronger multiple times.

"I would die for you."

Somehow, those kind of strong words that Taiyou would normally never use popped into his mind.

Taiyou believed that these were definitely her feelings.

A little while later, the young old woman interrupted them from the side.

"What's this jya, are you saying you don't need the power of your second wife?"

"I did not expect for you to butt into the conversation at a time like this."

"I'm a woman so, instead of using logic we like to speak using our emotions jya. Sometimes we also get jealous."

"Yes, of course I also need you. If they are in charge of the domestic and foreign affairs, I want you to come and fight with me on the outside. To speak figuratively, I want to be able to rely on you to protect my back."

"Isn't this more of a role for Shirokiyami?"

"That girl is more like besides me..... no, I would imagine her to be standing a little bit in front of me. She is someone I imagine that is capable of thrusting herself head first into battle and cleaning everything up."

"I see. Umu, I completely understand the situation jya."

Kohaku nods and a smile floats across her face as well.

The two girls were smiling and her drew their bodies closer to his at the same time.

For a while a sweet atmosphere persists.

"Taiyou-san!"

"W-What is it?"

With Kazane suddenly shouting out, Taiyou was caught off guard and became startled.

"Just now I got a message from Koto-chan, Koto-chan has managed to find that girl."

"Is that true? Alright, let's all head towards the place Kotone is at—"

"Moreover, it seems that she has met up with Yami-chan. In accordance with Yami-chan's plan, they were moving stealthily so as not to provoke the girl."

"Eh?"

"Muu"

Both Taiyou and Kohaku's eyebrows jumped up at the same time.

"What's wrong? Is it bad for them to trail her from the shadows?"

"No I think it should be fine, if an expert such as her were to tail that girl, there should be no problems."

She was probably going to charge a part-timer fee the next time she met him but..... This was not the time to be concerned about that.

"Ummm, then.....?"

"Haven't you noticed it yet?"

"What haven't I noticed?"

".....Kazane, would you mind if you were to ask Kotone's present location?"

"Yes..... We passed this place during the day time, it's near a soba noodle store where a heliport was close by."

"I see, also can you ask if Shirokiyami has brought her katana with her? It would be fine to also ask if she brought any type of weapons."

"Okay..... Umm, when she was asked about the katana, she said that it's hidden behind her skirt next to her body. Also she was surprised because we asked such a thing suddenly."

"Oh."

"Umm..... Is there something else you needed to ask her? She told us that because we are following the girl, it's not good to keep making so much noise."

"Ahh, there's no more questions, well in truth I still have some but..."

"???"

Kazane tilts her neck in confusion.

"How about you, have you noticed it?"

Taiyou used the same words that Kohaku asked him moments ago.

"What do you mean by notice something?"

"Since a moment ago, both you and Kotone are not just communicating via your emotions, you have actually been communicating with words, isn't that right?"

".....Ah"

Chapter 100: The Two Master's / Aren't Parents Supposed to Give Birth and Get Old.....?

[Are we really able to have a conversation..... Suzu-chan can you also hear us?]

[Yeah, loud and clear.]

[What's going on? It feels like we went back to our childhood.]

[Back then we always used to talk like this amongst ourselves. While the other people around us kept looking at with faces that said "What are those girls doing?"]

[Since when did we lose our ability I wonder? Eh, but there's probably no need to ask that.]

[Yeah, it's when father.....]

[That's right... Therefore, the reason we were able to regain this ability is because ——]

[Of Taiyou-san, right?]

[As expected, Taiyou is our fated person.]

[Yes, I'm so glad we met him.]



Since a while ago, Kazane had been keeping silent. Without a doubt she must have been conversing with her two other sisters.

This could clearly be seen on her face as she constantly changed her expression dramatically from one of surprise to one of joy.

After some time..... It would seem that she finished, so she turned to face Taiyou.

"Taiyou-san, there is a message from Suzu-chan. She said that she's joined up with Aoba-san, but because Koto-chan and Yami-chan are keeping track of the girl, Aoba-san is going to be coming back here to meet with us."

"I understand, please tell her we will be waiting for her here. Also, when you're done, I want you to go meet with Kotone and Suzune. I have somewhere that I need to go with Kohaku-san for a little bit."

"Where will you be going? I also want to come."

For a moment, Kazane's small face showed an incredulous expression. Just when she thought that she was useful to Taiyou, he suddenly wanted to go somewhere without her, so she thought she was still insufficient and she looked like a puppy that was about to be abandoned.

Looking at her like this, Taiyou gave her a peck on the lips *chuu* in order to comfort her mind.

"It's not because I don't need you, in fact I know that I will need you girls from now and long into the future. That's why, now that your telepathic abilities have returned, you girls should really meet up with each other. It's hard to explain it with words but, I really feel that it would be better if you did so."

".....Okay."

Though she gazed into Taiyou's eyes for a while longer, Kazane was eventually convinced as she went away in order to meet up with her two sisters.

Seeing her off safely, Kohaku let out a small sigh. This was a rare reaction coming from her.

"What's wrong Kohaku-san?"

"I just thought that.... The potential within young people is truly magnificent. I envy how dazzling they are and how they can look forward to their future with hope. It makes me wish that I met danna-sama back when I was in my prime..."

"Back then I wasn't even born yet, you know?"

Taiyou replied to her in a joking manner.

"Now that you mention it, you're right jya. But still, I'm still envious."

"Is that so?"

"That's right jya, everyone is growing alongside danna-sama and its really enviable jya, I'm already old like this and there isn't any room left for me to

grow so..."

"I don't think that's the case, is it?"

"Then let me paraphrase it. When someone reaches my age, their head becomes hard and it's not possible to change jya."

This time Kohaku spoke jokingly. Although she was almost saying the same thing in substance, putting it in this light hearted produce the right amount of self-blame so he could understand it.

"It makes it slightly more convincing somehow."

"Right?"

Kohaku covered her mouth as she giggled. Even though she was saying that she was jealous, it didn't seem like she really took it to heart.

Therefore, Taiyou didn't worry about it for much longer and he just enjoyed playing with her as per usual with their interesting conversations.

In this manner, the two people were conversing with each other without stopping until Aoba returned.

Taiyou, Kohaku and Aoba, all three people were lined up together and walking along the street at night. This was the road that Taiyou and Aoba used together a couple of hours ago. It was the route towards Pochi's house.

Kohaku was the one who suggested that they head there. While leaving the shadowing of the girl to Shirokiyami and the three triple sisters, their plan was to investigate Pochi's mansion.

Because there were also some parts to the story told by Hanaeda that were inexplicable, Taiyou readily accepted the proposal to check up on the place.

And so the three people walking shoulder-to-shoulder headed towards the residence.

"Come to think of you, you have really beautiful hair jyanou. As expected, having a hair so long, doesn't it require a lot of maintenance?"

On the way there, Kohaku suddenly brought this up. It was something that had nothing to do with the place they were heading to and it was directed at

the girl on the other side of Taiyou, the girl with the pony tail.

"Once you get used to it, it isn't such a big deal. Kohaku-san hasn't ever grown her hair?"

"I don't remember, I think the longest I've ever had my hair was at the length where it reached my shoulder jyata."

"Is that so?"

"But when I look at you like this, it makes me remember of Junishima Yurikago."

"Jyuunishima Youran? Who is that?"

"Ahh that's right, you've never met her before jyana. Just like you she had long her, she also had a twin tail jya. When you walk, both of you share the same walking gait."

"Oh?"

"That girl she often decided to walk in front of danna-sama and at the same time danna-sama liked to pull on her hair as she walked jyata"

"Eh?"

Aoba showed a surprised expression and Taiyou smiled bitterly.

"Did he really pull her hair?"

When she asked back, Kohaku nodded.

"Every time I saw her, he was always pulling on her hair jya. He also ignored all of her complaints."

".....Somehow, whenever I saw her twin tail, I just had this irresistible urge to pull on it. Including her reactions when she told me that she didn't like it."

"It's not like I don't understand, when she was in her disguise, it felt pretty good to tease her."

As the two of them were talking about Yurikago, Aoba who was walking side by side with Taiyou suddenly moved forwards half a step in front of him.

"Aoba?"

Aoba keeps walking silently as her ponytail shakes from side to side like a lively fish tail. Wondering what was going on, he called her out on it.

"Aoba, you don't have to be in such a rush. In the case that Pochi returns to the mansion, the girls would give us a report so we can take it easy."

"....."

Aoba turns around and watches Taiyou silently. For some reason, he felt like she was giving him a slightly reproachful look and he was puzzled by it.

"W-What's wrong?"

".....It's nothing".

This time she had a sulky expression as she slowed down her pace and started walking next to Taiyou again. 'What was going on with her?' is what he was thinking in his own mind, this time it was Kohaku's turn who was on the opposite side to stifle a laughter.

Just what on earth was going on? Taiyou inclined his head to one side and was oblivious to the current state of affairs. He wanted to just ask the girls straight out but he suddenly imagined a scene of him stepping on a field full of landmines. Suddenly feeling two droplets of sweat dripping down his back, he decided it was best not to touch on the subject.

After continuing to walk towards the mansion in such a way, the three people shortly arrived at their destination. This was the mansion that Pochi was staying at.

Aoba clung to Taiyou's side and under Kohaku's leadership they headed towards the entrance of the building. The young looking old woman placed her hand to turn the door knob and a sound of *click* resounded, however the door merely created the sound without showing any intentions of opening up.

"It seems that it is locked jya, is danna-sama going to take care of this one? Or shall I?"

"I just want to clarify but, what does Kohaku-san intend to do?"

"It's a peculiar skill I learned a long time ago, if it's a lock like this, I can open it in less than a minute."

Saying this Kohaku takes out a hairpin. Regardless of where she pulled it out from, it was a wonderful item that allowed someone to know instantly what it was going to be used for with a single glance.

"You past is really heavy isn't it?"

Smiling bitterly, Taiyou placed his hands on the door knob and turned the handle. Instantly the door makes a snapping noise and opens up.

"Danna-sama that took you three seconds jyatana?"

"We are a little pressed for time so... I will make sure to properly apologize later for breaking it."

Shrugging his shoulders, Kohaku smiles at him approvingly. Going through the entrance of the door one by one, they attempted to turn on the light switch but it didn't turn on after pressing it.

"If this was a horror game, we would probably start by restoring electricity to the place."

"In that case we need to find the fuse first. But this is real life, so it's probably because the bills haven't been paid for?"

"That's probably true, in this case we would probably need to find both a power generator and some gasoline to fix it jya."

Kohaku takes out her mobile phone and uses the light function attached to her camera. A light comparable to one that is given off by a flashlight illuminates the inside of the dark building.

It was like the three people were exploring a haunted house together. Some of the doors they encountered were also locked, but each time Taiyou would break the locks in place and intrude inside.

Gradually a sense of unease spreads out to the three of them.

"Hey Natsuno-kun, isn't this room..... A child's room as well?"

"Ahh, it is a child's room."

"This room, the one before.... and even the one before that, they were all children's rooms."

"That's correct, all the rooms we have seen so far were children's rooms."

The three people wondered at the oddity as they stood still and looked all around the inside of the room.

Hera had mentioned before that there were children's rooms being properly maintained. Therefore, he was not surprised to see the rooms even after intruding the mansion.

However, no matter which room he went in, they were all children's rooms and he could not help but to feel a sense of discomfort. The size of the furniture along with anything and everything else was made under the premise that it would be used by children.

"What could this all mean? That woman by the name of Karina, did she really want to spoil Pochi to this extent?"

"Even so this is abnormal."

"Danna-sama, take a look at this."

Kohaku had found something by the side of the room and presented it towards Taiyou. It was a slightly dusty and heavy old album.

After dusting it off carefully and opening it, there was a photograph of Pochi with an unknown woman next to her.

"This is.... Something that was taken in this room right?"

"It looks to be the case. Then this is the room we were in a while ago?"

"This very young looking child is Pochi I think? It really resembles her face."

"If so, who is this young child over here?"

The three people were confused. In the photograph, they saw a girl around the age of ten, carrying a baby in her arms. There were babies that didn't really look so different when they grew up. Pochi was no doubt one of these types of people.

Still not really knowing the identity of the other girl, they flipped the pages of the album one after another. Gradually, they were able to find out that this was an album that recorded Pochi's growth throughout the years.

The Pochi within the album soon grew up. From a baby that was crawling on the ground to a toddler who was taking its first tottering steps. Changing into different colorful clothes she eventually grew up into a very beautiful girl.

The face of the three people looking at this stiffened up little by little.

In 1 out of every 5 pictures, there was a girl in the picture with Pochi.

Somehow, that girl never grew up into adulthood. Whilst Pochi continued to grow and pass the other girls height, the other girl looked completely the same as the first picture they saw.

At first she seemed to be relatively healthy, but in the current picture, she still looked to be ten years of age..... however, she was riding on a wheelchair.

Aoba was in astonishment and Taiyou was taken aback.

"She's one of the eternally little?"

Kohaku muttered in response, she had the most surprised look in her face. The expression on her face conveyed that she could not believe what she was seeing in front of her eyes.

"An eternally little gave birth to her own child jyato?"

Chapter 101: The Two Master's / "Car"

Kohaku had an astonished expression on her face while inside Karina's mansion. The face illuminated by the flash light from the phone was like she was in some horror movie.

Just as she was surprised, Taiyou was also surprised.

"Is it that unusual.....? eh, was it that unusual?"

Eternally Little, also known as the leftover old maids. To people like us, giving birth to our own children is an exceedingly rare case jya"

"Umm, what was it again? The ratio of Eternally Little who got married is one in ten, and the people who didn't get divorced and actually had children is a further one-tenth of that, right?"

Aoba spoke from the side as if to confirm the facts. She was not there in the past when they had this sort of conversation, so her being able to say this right now made Taiyou astonished.

"You seem to know a lot about this, or more like even I didn't know about the second part you mentioned."

"I investigated it for a bit. I wanted to quickly get along with everyone else, so I..."

"I see."

Taiyou nods and Kohaku who still hadn't gotten over the shock of it replied.

"That's right jya, to add to that the ratio of Eternally Little born is at a rate of one person in 500,000. Do you know what this means?"

"..... This means that there are probably only one or two at most in Japan at a time?"

"Ah....."

After a short interval, Taiyou and Aoba looked at the album at the same time with a surprised face. If they cross referenced it with the statistics up until now, there wasn't any eternally little that could possibly have a baby, it was a

hopeless to consider.

It can be assumed this woman in the album was the only one. As this was the case, it was natural for Kohaku to be so amazed.

"However with this, it all makes sense, as an eternally little mother, she was not able to go outside and mingle in the presence of other people."

Kohaku was convinced after looking at the album and then makes a proposal to Taiyou.

"Danna-sama, let's search a little more. I want some more detailed information."

"Yeah, I also thought the same."

"I will help out!"

Taiyou nods solemnly and Aoba releases Taiyou's arm which she was clinging to. The three people regained their composure and began to search the residence again.

They searched each of the rooms while relying on the light shone by their smartphones.

"Natsuno-kun! Look over here!"

In the third room they passed since obtaining the album, Aoba shouted out in a cheery voice as she found a cover with the title "Diary" on the top. When they turned over the cover, they knew that the contents matched the title.

Since coming to this place, all the events were recorded on the white paper with neat handwriting. It wasn't the type of diary that one wrote in every single day, it was more of the diary that you wrote when there was something important going on.

The three people read the diary carefully. There was recounts of events from all the four seasons. When reading such a diary where the two people clearly held deep emotions for each other, a really vivid image appears of what they lived like.

Just like a brilliant novel, this diary made them engrossed in the story. Before they noticed it, the three people had read through the end.

The diary cut off this Spring. Karina was bound to her sickbed and the last letters were written shakily as she expressed her concern for Pochi's future.

After the three people finished reading, all three of them couldn't help but to sigh.

After a while, Taiyou was the first to open his mouth.

"If this diary wrote the facts of the matter, there are somethings that I now understand."

"Yes, Pochi is the real daughter of Karina-san and she was loved. Karina is one of the Eternally Little and she realized that her life was nearing it's end during Spring, now she has probably already passed away."

"And one more thing."

"Her naming sense is the worst, jyana?"

The three of them smiled bitterly at Kohaku's words.

This was their shared view after reading the diary. Karina undoubtedly loved Pochi with all her heart, it was to the point of doting on her. From the way she wrote, it clearly depicted that she thought "Pochi" was the best name ever.

It wasn't anything nasty or something meant as a joke, she genuinely thought that it was the best name. Considering all of this, the three of doubt could not help but to doubt her naming sense.

"Even so, why did she have to live hidden in this kind of place? Why didn't she register Pochi's birth?"

Taiyou riffled through the diary.

"That's true jya, there is nothing that alludes to this point. Neither is there any information on the father."

"There must be some more clues? let's look for a bit more."

At Taiyou's suggestion they started searching again.

They looked all over the rooms. Since they obtained information that Karina was in fact an Eternally Little, all the rooms which supposedly resembled kids rooms were now distinguishable between Pochi's room and Karina's room.

They understood this because it was clear that Karina really cherished Pochi. Her room was filled with the basic daily necessities but Pochi's room would have toys and other entertainment goods within the room.

But with that alone, even if they went into all the rooms, they weren't able to gain any additional information.

In such a case, there was no longer any need for them to remain in the residence. This time, they wanted to hear the story directly from Pochi.

As soon as he left the residence, Taiyou caught something out of the corner of his sight.

Seeing that he took a glance at Kohaku. After knowing that Karina was an Eternally Little, Kohaku had a grim expression. Although it's not to the extent that she was depressed, ever since entering the residence, the level of tension has increased.

Seeing her like this, Taiyou said this to her.

"Let's go for a drive."

".....huh?"

"W-What are you saying Natsuno-kun?"

"Wait a moment."

Saying this Taiyou heads towards the storage room where he first found Pochi. There was one of these bike trailers left behind.

"Come aboard."

"You mean on top of this?"

"Yes, let's drive with this."

".....I understand. It looks kinda interesting jya."

"Hey you too, Aoba."

"Y-Yeah."

Aoba was at a loss and Kohaku became slack jawed. Taiyou beckoned them to hop on the trailer and he started pulling the trailer forwards with all his

strength.

As they journeyed onward, Taiyou's trailer was approaching its upper speed limit. The trailer was moving fast along the wind and Kohaku was in a good mood whereas Aoba gradually enjoyed it more. Overtaking some young people that was riding on a bicycle and leaving them in the dust made the two girls giggle and smile at the ridiculous sight.

Looking back behind him to see the bright faces of the girl and Kohaku who seemed to have regained her composure, Taiyou thought that it was well worth it to do these stupid things.

Kohaku was really enjoying the trip. Along the way, they needed to contact Kotone to confirm their location and Kohaku was bragging full on about how fun it was to go on the trailer and get driven around by Taiyou. This caused the three sisters to feel very jealous of them.

Hearing about the location via the phone, they arrived in due time and stopped the trailer right in front of Pochi. The two girls who got off from the trailer's platform stood in front of Pochi.

After loosening his grip of the handle he also headed towards Pochi. Just as he was thinking of what to say.

"Master!"

Before he could even open his mouth, Pochi suddenly jumped over to hug Kohaku. Calling the un-aging girl "Master" and smelling her with a *sniff sniff*. If this happened several hours ago, they wouldn't know what to make of it but after knowing Karina's true identity and reading her diary, he had a semblance of what was going on.

Apparently Pochi is associating the smell of an Eternally Little person to her "Master". The reason she followed Taiyou in the first place and also the reason she let her guard down in front of the three sisters is because there was a lingering scent from Kohaku.

Pochi clings herself to Kohaku and Kohaku responds by embracing her in a soothing manner.

For the time being, Taiyou left the two to their own devices as he made his

way closer towards Shirokiyami who was standing a little distance away.

"Thank you."

She was thanked and she responds to him quietly whilst staring at him with her boundless gaze.

"It wasn't..... a big deal. it's only to the extent of a night's lodging and... a meal. I'm only.... returning the favour."

"That latter half is quite funny when said in Japanese."

"That's why..... you should quickly return the debt."

"Let's continue the conversation then. Well in any case. Just how much was left of it again? If I remember correctly I just returned around 10 million before this so it should have decreased by a large amount"

"....."

"....."

"....."

Shirokiyami looks doubtful as she stares blankly.

"Don't you remember?!"

"I remember..... there is, 10 million left."

"How can that be possible?! No matter how you calculate it after the last payment, there should only be a little left over you know?!"

"I've included the..... interest."

"That's just extortion I tell you! And really sloppy accounting I'm telling you!"

"Togo also did.... the same"

"You are really wicked! You are even worse than that person!"

"I'm just kidding.... After including the interest, it's fine to just pay 2 million more."

"Well that seems more reasonable."

The figure she came up with was still really just a rough estimate, but because

Taiyou also thought that it was around that amount he consented to it.

After settling the negotiations with Shirokiyami he was looking back towards Kohaku and the others when Taiyou realized something.

The place where Shirokiyami was standing at didn't have much light and behind her was a forest. He recalled that last night a typhoon passed by. Shirokiyami was clearly pretending back then to put on a brave front. For a moment he thought that perhaps he could use this to his advantage in order to defeat her.

"The other day.... I saw this movie."

"Eh?"

Suddenly Shirokiyami speaks out of context. Taiyou was wondering where this was going as he stared at her in puzzlement.

"A robot movie, the robot is aggressive..... After it wakes up it opens its mouth wide and becomes ferocious. Swallowing up everyone in the surroundings..... it becomes a slaughter machine."

"Ah, I may have seen that one as well. Or more like, isn't that one of the famous masterpieces? What about it?"

"If someone..... did something I didn't like.... I may also become like that."

"——Ugh ! "

In that instant, Taiyou's backbone freezes as he experienced a shudder. Almost like someone just put a really cold ice cube against his back, his whole body was frozen in place.

For a moment he was ready for death. Such terror was wrapping across his whole body.

The sense of shock paralyzed him. It was only a few seconds after that he realized that this was killing intent.

When he noticed it his fear was quickly suppressed.

"Do you hate it that much?!"

"What do you, mean?"

Shirokiyami was playing dumb. After releasing so much killing intent she was still able to play it off that easily. Taiyou could only be amazed.

"Ah yes yes, it's nothing! I won't touch your reverse-scale again alright?!"

"Yeah, you can't touch..... a persons reverse-scale. No matter who, it is."

"Yea, yeah."

While interacting like so, Pochi's state of mind had calmed down by a lot, she was whispering to the old-young girl about something. Because he wanted to ask them something, he naturally came closer to the two of them.

Realizing this Kohaku grabbed Pochi by the hand and pushed her back towards Taiyou's direction.

"Go on, you can say it jya."

"But I....."

"Then, shall I say it on your behalf?"

"Eh, that is....."

Although Pochi hesitates for a while, she soon shook her head clear.

"No, I will say it by myself."

"Umu, do your best jya."

Pochi being sent off by Kohaku, turned to face Taiyou. She stood within touching distance of him before taking a huge breath. Before long she became determined.

"Goshujin-sama! Please keep me!"

"For the time being, I'm going to ask Kohaku for an explanation..."

After calming himself down, Taiyou turned to ask Kohaku as he had no idea what had just occurred.

Chapter 102: The Two Master's / The Master of a Master

"Danna-sama, I think we should keep this girl."

"You haven't given an explanation yet."

Repeating the same retort, Taiyou was still demanding an explanation.

Neither Taiyou, the three sisters and Aoba who had tried to come closer to the conversation between Kohaku and Pochi could have expected this outcome, they all had bewildered expressions. Only Shirokiyami maintained her boundless gaze, but even so there was no doubt that she was still looking with interest at the group.

Everyone's thoughts became one and the mood indicated that the people demanded an explanation about Pochi's situation.

"Please explain to me so that I can understand it more."

"In that case, let's explain in order. Danna-sama is my Master jya"

"Rather than Master, isn't it closer to head of the household....?"

Aoba was pointing out the difference between the two meanings as if explaining something to a foreign person. However, Kohaku didn't mind the words and continued to talk in her own pace.

"And I will become this girl's Master. In such a case, it is only natural that I obtain permission from Danna-sama in order to keep her jya."

"Hang on a second, if you're trying to explain things in order, I feel like there is something very important being left out."

"It's a normal thing to skip past the boring process and just go straight to the result jya."

"What type of end game boss are you?!"

"You shouldn't worry about it, I don't really worry about the small things."

"I'm telling you to explain so that I can understand what happened before."

"Umm excuse me..... The Master of my Master?"

Taiyou was about to give a vehement retort to Kohaku when Pochi addresses him from the side. Her eyes were wet and moist, it was really reminiscent of the famous “puppy eyes” gesture.

"Is it really impossible, to keep me?"

"No no, to begin with, do you really understand the word “keep” in this particular context?"

"Yes, doesn't it have the meaning of “Providing food for a pet and fostering them”?"

"You actually understood?! Eh, why are you answering in such a joyful way then?!"

"Hey, Suzu-chan, Kaza-chan, even back when we were in the room a while ago, I have a feeling that this is....."

"Yeah, there's no doubt about it, I'm looking it up in my smart phone right now."

"But, it might be just a coincidence so, let's just wait a little while longer."

The three sisters were whispering something amongst themselves from the side, but right now Taiyou's mind was filled with Pochi's situation so he couldn't really concentrate on what they were talking about.

To such a Taiyou, Pochi attempts to give the finishing blow.

"I would really love it if, the Master of my Master could keep me!"

"For the time being, just wait."

"Yes!"

Pochi immediately listens to the command “Wait”. Voices of admiration comes out from the surrounding women.

"That's not the kind of meaning I was intending! You girls also are having really weird responses!"

"It wasn't a “Wait” command?"

"It wasn't! So for the time being, please just stand over there on standby!"

Raising his voice to a shout, he talked in a manner that wasn't normally used in everyday conversations. Even so Pochi's response was "I understand!" with great joy in her voice.

"For now, Kohaku-san, please don't try to rush off and give us a proper explanation, is that alright?"

"Hmm let's see, well, you've probably realized it long ago but, I plan on taking care of this girl."

"... Yes."

After seeing that Kohaku was finally speaking in a serious tone of voice, Taiyou answers slowly with a nod.

"First is that this girl is the daughter of an Eternally Little jya. I spoke a little with this girl when she jumped over and apparently she is able to smell a different scent when comparing normal human beings and the Eternally little. It seems that there is a smell that is peculiar to the Eternally Little jya. In other words, both Karina and I have the same kind of smell."

"You are both part of the Eternally Little after all."

Aoba who accompanied her to Karina's mansion, was murmuring in acknowledgement.

"That's right jya. In addition to that, this girl has become emotionally attached to me. As you can tell her disposition is like so, perhaps she sees me as her mother and is seeking protection from me."

"I see."

"And one other thing. Would it be alright if you didn't laugh after hearing this?"

"What is it?"

He looked towards Kohaku in a manner that implied that he wasn't going to laugh. She had a serious look on her face.

"Since a long time ago, it's been a dream of mine to become a mother.

Although she has been using the words “Master” to address us, for her this word is equivalent to the word mother."

"Ahh, Iwashiro-san also mentioned the same thing."

"I feel like this has been all according to fate. I will take this girl to the government office and make a proper family register for her and officially make her my daughter. If I do this, I feel like I can enjoy the feeling of being a mother that I've always wished for."

"You mean like a daughter-in-law? Wasn't Iwashiro-san also in the same relationship?"

"That's a little different jya, she may think of me in that way, but I was merely acting as her supporter jya. I wasn't her mother."

"I see."

Taiyou nods. She didn't say the precise circumstances of the story but hearing the words “acting as her supporter” he could conjure up an image of what might have happened between the two. Certainly, in that sense she couldn't really be called a mother, at the very least, she couldn't claim to have felt “motherly feelings” from such a thing.

"That's why, I'm planning on taking her in jyaga..... As I've said before, I intend to offer my everything to Danna-sama—I will also keep doing it from now. That's why, I really hope to obtain Danna-sama's consent in the matter."

"So that's how it was. By the way, what's with her calling me the Master of my Master....?"

"She's just following along to what I was calling you, probably..."

"So it's cause of you?! Well, it certainly makes more sense now."

"After all, she has a submissive personality similar to a dog, so she may have recognized you in this type of way."

After Aoba mentions this, Taiyou recalls the specific behavioral traits a dog possesses. When a dog follows a ranking hierarchy within a human household, they sometimes recognize multiple members above its own ranking. That's where this Master of my Master is coming from.

"I suppose it's similar to having an Alpha?"

"She's not doing this because she fears you or anything jya."

"No I wasn't worried about that."

Taiyou exhales a small breath of air and faces Kohaku once again. She keeps her smile but also has this longing look in her eyes. That's the kind of eyes Taiyou thought she had.

On their way back, they also used the trailer driven by Taiyou.

It couldn't really be called a comfortable ride, the three sisters were barely sitting on the edge of the seats and the newcomer Pochi was clinging on to Kohaku tightly. Just like how he arrived, he didn't seem to be sweating in the slightest, by his side Shirokiyami's silent footsteps could be heard as she kept up with him.

From anyone's perspective, they would seem like a strange line-up. If rumors were to be spread by witnesses, it was a sight that could easily become a ghost story or urban legend.

Even though he was slower than when he arrived, it was still like he was driving a cross bike at full speed. With the wind blowing against them, the beautiful women had their hairs running wildly against the wind.

Meanwhile, the three sisters were asking Pochi questions.

"An Islamic countries royal family, or perhaps a lady's room from a noble family. Or a single man with a lot of women attending him. Something like that?"

"What do you think, Suzu-chan?"

"It makes sense, but I feel like a different place also exists."

"I don't think so, Suzu-chan, that kind of word is written like this in the dictionary. There is no mid part to what Suzu-chan is looking at."

"Ah, so that's how it is."

"But you guys, seem to notice it quite early jya."

The women were chattering noisily with each other. Pochi included, they had a happy atmosphere around them.

"It increased.... again."

Shirokiyami mutters.

"Before I noticed it..... it keeps on multiplying. One moment there is one girl..... now there are three, hmm."

"You are also a girl, so can't you stop talking in such a hypothetical manner?"

Taiyou tries to give her a quip, but in the next moment it was like she disappeared from sight.

"Besides, it didn't really increase in the manner you were hinting, right? After all, Pochi is becoming Kohaku-san's daughter."

"Eh?"

"Huh?"

Shirokiyami was surprised by Taiyou's words and he was also surprised at her reaction.

"What do you mean when you go 'Eh'?"

"Well, it's cause, I know her secret... plan"

"What did you say?"

While running, he turns around. And met with Kohaku's gaze.

"As expected of Yami, I can't hide anything from you."

"It's not like... you really hid it."

"Wait a minute Kohaku-san, are you still hiding something from us?"

"No, I've already spoken about it."

Kohaku speaks indifferently.

"Just like Yami has said, I haven't really tried to hide it jya. Rather, Danna-sama is the one who hasn't noticed it jya."

"I'm the one who hasn't noticed?"

""""Ohh!""""

Clap, clap, clap, sounds of clapping resounded. Leaving Taiyou aside, the three sisters already noticed it first.

"W-What is it?"

"Ahh, it's natural if Aoba-san hasn't realized it yet, when we talked about this in the past, you weren't with us yet. When I declared that I was Danna-sama's thing, I presented both my body and mind towards Danna-sama jya."

"Such a thing... Ah?"

After Kohaku gives her a hint, Aoba seems to have understood the situation.

"Hang on a minute, what are you guys.... Oh."

He was a little behind the girls, but Taiyou finally understood. He finally understood the meaning behind Kohaku's words.

"Kohaku-san... don't tell me you..."

While running with the trailer in tow, he looked behind and stared at Kohaku with a cold gaze. Kohaku was looking at him with a big smile on her face.

"What comes after sisters mixed in a rice bowl is of course a mother-daughter bowl jya."

Taiyou was completely dumbfounded, he did not expect in the slightest that Kohaku would be scheming something like this.

"If she's your daughter, isn't it obvious that this will become incest?!!"

This was the loudest quip Taiyou gave in this day. He really did not expect for Kohaku to be planning something like this.

Chapter 103: Girls in Distress / Sun Tzu's Art of War

Taiyou looked up at the night sky once he entered the garden, arms folded. The moon was hung high in the sky as if it were a plate decorated with the stars of the entire sky, and these two contrasts weren't usually a visible sight from the city.

"There are a lot of stars, but the moon is the same as ever, I guess."

"That's...t, rue."

As he muttered to no one in particular, he felt Shirokiyami stand next to him. It wasn't just her manner of speaking derived from her unique way of breathing; he had just recently sort of begun to recognize her presence. Taiyou, who was in love with her, thought very positively of that.

"People long ago...looked at the moon that never changed even when they were on a trip...they were reminded of their, home town."

"Yeah, there was that sort of haiku or poem, huh."

"Yes, that much...doesn't change, after all."

"I see. By the way, aren't you going to enter the hot spring?"

Taiyou listened carefully as he asked Shirokiyami. From the other side of the building, behind the detached area that had an open-bath family-oriented stall, he could hear high-pitched voices. Just earlier, the girls that had returned via the trailer had dubbed this as welcoming party and invited Pochi into the hot spring. The voices that he was hearing right now were the females entering the bath. Speaking of which, Taiyou was also invited, but he refused. Furthermore, he had left the building, trying to...avoid any potential disaster. Incidentally, Shirokiyami was also invited to come along, so he had really thought that she would enter the hot spring with them.

"According, to...Sun Tzu."

Taiyou had a puzzled look on his face, questioning what she had suddenly started saying. A fastball thrown into the day after tomorrow. She would from time-to-time have this habit of refusing to follow up in the catch-ball of conversation.

"What do you mean?"

He somehow picked up that ball, attempting to throw it back.

"Those who fighteth virtuously, are those who winneth against easy opponents."

"Sorry, can you say that in a more easy-to-understand manner? I mean, you're saying it in a really fluent way so I'm sure that those are some really important words to you."

"We, don't...fight losing battles."

"I'm starting to get this less and less."

"If you become an adult...will you, understand?"

"So is this a question?"

"Or maybe...soon, after this."

"What are you, a commercial!"

A good-tempo back-and-forth conversation unfolded, but it ended with him still confused.

"In any, case."

"Yeah?"

"So, are you really going to go for...the Mother-Daughter Bowl?"

"Not a chance."

In response to the new topic that she brought up, Taiyou laughed in a strained manner and shook his head.

"Kohaku-san's just saying that on her own, okay? I don't have that sort of intention. And besides, Kohaku-san is just saying that as a joke, I'm telling you."

"I know someone...who is, like, that person."

"Huh?"

"Saying that they're nothing...people who add more, than they need, to."

That seemed to be yet another ball that went into the day after tomorrow, but this time it shifted to a Guin curveball with the likes of a magic ball. Unlike earlier, he got the gist of what Shirokiyami was trying to say.

"...You're saying that Kohaku-san is like that, aren't you?"

"That's...how the, phrase went."

The phrase. Taiyou pondered those words in his head. The phrase that Kohaku often put to her mouth like a catchphrase. A phrase that every time it was uttered, he secretly felt that it was too much.

— —I offer everything to you.

Almost as if she were swearing an oath, she let that phrase out of her mouth at every opportunity. As if reexamining something within herself, she would turn to Taiyou and continue saying it.

"That phrase, huh..."

"That person is, serious...I, think. She intends to...strip herself of her daughter and, offer her to you."

"No way, that has to just be a play-on-words. Cause Kohaku-san usually does that sort of conversational exchange."

"But...power dwells, in her words. Just like how you say...that you'll defeat, me."

"Yep, I'll definitely defeat you."

Saying that, Taiyou took a step back into a fighting pose. Deciding that it was best not to dig too deep into Kohaku's affairs, he attempted to change the conversation.

"I've become a bit stronger, so can I come at you right now?"

"...I, won't."

But Shirokiyami didn't play along. She wasn't even paying attention to Taiyou, silently gazing up at the sky.

Being ignored annoyed him so he thought to still rush at her...but he decided to stop. Looking at her from the side gazing at the moon, she was acting obscure as usual, and there didn't seem to be any way to get ahold of her.

Taiyou felt that her face was pretty. Her face-in-profile would be in the "best three" among the girls that he loved. If it meant wrecking that face and that atmosphere, then he didn't want to forcibly challenge her.

Taiyou was fascinated by the view of her sidelong face for a short while.

If he were to take a picture and submit it for a contest, it would undoubtedly have the title of "Heaps of Corpses All Around". That kind of scenery unfolded before Taiyou's eyes when he returned to the room. The three sisters along with Kohaku, as well as Aoba. They had come out of the bath in their yukatas

with a tinge of cherry blossom adorning their skin, but some of them were hanging their heads with their hands and knees pressed against the floor with the shape of the “orz” emoticon, while others were leaning against the wall with the air of a burnt-out boxer.

These were clear signs of some form of severe psychological damage, not to be taken lightly.

"What happened?"

"I lost..."

Aoba replied, dejectedly hanging her head. There was no power in her words.

"You lost?"

"To think they would be that big..."

"They were way bigger than when clothed..."

"That's just...that's just cheating..."

"Kotone? Suzune? Kazane?"

"You girls are still fine jya, I'm just...I'm just..."

"Even you, Kohaku-san? What in the world happened?"

"I get you, Kohaku-san! I'm of the same opinion!"

"You understand me, Kazane!"

The two small-framed individuals who had been fighting for first place tightly embraced each other inside the house. The atmosphere was just like those typical 8 a.m. public management broadcasts. Taiyou tilted his head some more after seeing that sight. Fidgeting in depressed and excited manners, those girls were clearly not their normal selves. He surveyed the inside of the room to figure out what the cause was.

"Master."

"Ohh, it's you, Pochi, what exactly——"

Unlike the brides, Pochi's voice coming from behind him was the same tone as before. Thinking he could find out something from her, Taiyou turned around, but what appeared before him stole his gaze.

"Melon..."

Taiyou muttered for some reason. In a moment, the room was filled with even deeper feelings of resentment. When wearing a yukata, Pochi boasted a

volume that was vastly larger than when wearing her regular clothing. Taiyou looked at that, and looked at the girls. 'I see'...he began to say but immediately swallowed his words.

"And I thought that we'd be fine in this area."

"No Aoba, you're pretty fine too, you know?"

"I don't need your obvious counseling!"

Aoba screamed in a hysterical voice that felt quite exaggerated.

"You're going over the top..."

And although he said that, Taiyou secretly felt that he somewhat understood. After comparing the girls, he attempted to say the results in his head.

Aoba: Mediocre breasts.

Kotone, Suzune, and Kazane: Meager breasts.

Kohaku——Flat as a wall.

And Pochi's huge breasts dwarfed all of their sizes put together.

(Priceless big breasts...)

Saying that to himself looking at each of their chests in turn, Taiyou was reminded of a commercial rhythm that he had often seen a while back. But since putting that into words would result in something catastrophic, he resisted the urge. He also resisted the urge to praise Pochi's rack. Glancing at his unnecessary conflict, the girls began to band together.

"This is no good, I gotta start drinking milk from tomorrow onward!"

"I'll also prepare small fish, Aoba-san!"

"We'll also do our best!"

"I'll think up a get-big meal menu with my utmost effort, okay!"

The sisters encouraging each other and Aoba. Kohaku who was ridiculing herself to the side.

"I envy these youngsters, with nothing on their minds but their futures and hopes."

"Those were fine words, but is this really the place to use them!?"

"Master..."

Pochi was trembling. Her face showed that she understood that she had caused her mother-master and the others to become this way. But, she had not

done one thing wrong. At least that's what Taiyou thought.

"No, it's not your fault. If anything, it's their own self-destruction."

"Self-destruction?"

"Yes...because they challenged her, even though it was already clear...self, destruction."

Emerging suddenly by Taiyou's side, Shirokiyami gave a supplemental explanation. It seemed that she hadn't really taken any damage.

"When did you get back. ...Wait, so this is what you meant when you said you wouldn't fight?"

"Grasping your capabilities is...important, impor, tant."

She said nonchalantly.

"Oh, you should also enter the hot spring, Taiyou-san."

"The hot water was amazing."

"Yes, the hot water was..."

Somewhat depressed, the three sisters referred Taiyou to the hot spring. Taiyou did just that. There was no point being here, so he took a towel and yukata from them and headed to the hot spring. He undressed in the changing room and entered. That was a spectacular open-air bath. Possibly designed with families in mind, that separate, private place had a bath that could fit everyone with room to spare. Just standing at the entrance was enough to rub against his nasal cavity with the smell of sulfur, and top of that, for some reason there was a large volume of apples lightly floating on the hot water.

"Perhaps it's a form of medicinal water?"

He wasn't sure what their intention was, but at the very least thought that it brought about some sort of atmosphere.

"Well, first I'd better wash my body——"

"Please let me do it."

"Yeah, go ahead and——like hell I'd say that!"

Instinctively responding, he turned around. Pochi was there. Having undressed at some point, she was standing there without a single thread covering her naked body.

"Wait, why exactly are you completely naked?"

"Umm...because Master said to do so."

"Kohaku-san!"

Chapter 104: Girls in Distress / The Confused Elderly Woman

Giving in to his emotions and raising his voice, Taiyou yelled in the direction of the room. Pochi, still naked, timidly peeked at Taiyou in response to him suddenly raising a loud voice. She wasn't necessarily frightened, but was more of perplexed as to why he had suddenly raised a loud voice. Taiyou was also perplexed, but, his cause of perplexation was much clearer. After all, he was certainly not expecting to see Pochi naked and the sight was too dazzling for his eyes.

Unable to face her head-on, he subtly avoided her with his eyes. Both in a state of perplexity, the two of them spent a brief moment of silence together. At length, Pochi gathered up her courage and broke the ice.

"Please let me wash your back."

"N-No, you don't have to do that."

In contrast to the courageous Pochi, Taiyou wavered like a middle-school boy.

"You just entered the hot spring, right? So come in before it gets cold."

"Uuu..."

As he rejected her offer, Pochi began to become more and more teary-eyed. A feeling of guilt pierced through Taiyou's chest.

"You don't want me to...?"

"No, it's just..."

"Uuu"

"Umm"

"Uuuuu..."

"I get it I get it, just please don't look at me like that."

Pochi's eyes were like that of an abandoned puppy. Unable to last against that, Taiyou gave permission. As soon as he did that, her face burst into a broad smile.

"Thank you!"

"...Before we do that..."

Taiyou diverted his eyes away from her and slipped past her side, making a mad dash for the changing room. Grabbing the door, he threw it open at once with a clatter.

"Hyaa!"

A female scream could be heard. The girls were gathered around the area where the door was thrown open. Kotone, Suzune, Kazane, Kohaku, Aoba, and even Shirokiyami were there. Leaving one exception, the girls had fallen down in surprise when Taiyou had suddenly opened the door.

"...What are you guys doing?"

"Erm, uhh...I was curious."

""""We thought it would come in handy.""""

"To monitor mah daughter's growth."

"Collective behavior is...important impor, tant."

Aoba answered with a faint voice, the disorganized sister trio actually answered in unison, Kohaku responded with a remark that was difficult to take seriously, and Shirokiyami was standing proudly without any prideful expression on her face for some reason.

Though there were a variety of interesting reactions, suddenly, the girls let a gasp escape their mouths. These were tiny, inaudible screams that could not be conveyed in words. There were some who were red-faced, and they were all focusing on one detail.

"What's wrong...Oh."

Taiyou realized what had happened as he asked. Fitting for the bathhouse, he was currently entirely naked, and the girls had their eyes focused on the...thing that was laying idle.

"S-Sorry."

Aoba, who had not experienced something like this before, turned as red as a lobster and bolted away like a startled hare. Chasing after her, the three sisters and Kohaku also left the changing room. The remaining Shirokiyami unexpectedly pulled out a katana from her skirt.

The white blade poked out of the scabbard, making a “shing” noise.

"Put away your...hazardous, material."

"How about you put away your hazardous material!"

Exclaiming loudly, he shut the door slam with all his might. Shaking off the girls, he returned to where Pochi was.

Having a change of heart, he sat in the bathhouse chair and had Pochi wash his back.

(Just a wash, it's just a wash)

He repeatedly chanted in his heart with a Buddhist-like prayer. In fact, he felt as if he were about to slide into an “All Is Vanity” attitude.

"Heave-ho, heave ho"

Not comprehending in the slightest what was going on in his mind, Pochi made a hand towel sudsy and let out an sweet, enthusiastic voice as she began to scrub his shoulders.

"How is it?"

"Not bad."

He bluntly answered.

"Okay!"

Pochi put even more power into it. Impressed, Taiyou thought that was very commendable.

"I'm skilled at rinsing people's backs. This is because I used to regularly do it to my master."

"Master...as in Karina Nose-san. So you guys regularly went to the bathhouse?"

"Yes, we went every day."

"I see. By the way, is it alright if I ask you what kind of person that Karina Nose-san was?"

"What kind of person Master was?"

Pochi's perplexed presence transmitted from behind his back. Even so, the scrubbing rhythm of her hands showed no alteration. Taiyou gave her a helping hand.

"Seems like she was a pretty small person, right?"

"Yes, the same as my current Master."

"And did you ever call her “Mom”?"

"I tried it a while ago, but it just didn't feel right. I felt that Master was Master and no one else."

"I see."

Slightly nodding, he began to think. The title of “Master” didn't seem to actually be forced on Pochi by Karina Nose, judging by what she said. Still having his back scrubbed by Pochi, Taiyou asked her various things about Karina Nose. Pochi answered each question faithfully after thinking earnestly each time. In the end, hearing mostly from a proud Pochi that she was doted on or that her relationship with Karina was quite close, he was able to reconfirm what the relationship between the two of them was like based also on Hanaeda's stories and Karina Nose's diary from before.

"Umm, Master is Master's Master, right?"

"That's complicated."

Taiyou smiled bitterly.

——Master Taiyou is Master Kohaku's Master-Husband.

Her statement would sound normal with an annotation, but if there were no annotation then her expression would sound very entangled. Of course, this was something that he could answer, so Taiyou distinctly nodded.

"That's right."

"And Master is also the Master of the other people as well, right?"

"Huh? Oh, you mean Aoba."

He wasn't able to immediately understand what she meant, so he answered after a short interval.

"Well yeah, that's also correct. Shirokiyami, that goth loli...wait, do you even know what “goth loli” means?"

"Yes. Abbreviated from “Gothic and Lolita” , it is a fashion style unique to Japan that combines the usually different elements of gothic and lolita. And it is also a way of pointing out that subculture, right?"

"I didn't expect an answer like that, but well, yeah. That goth loli clothed girl is

the only exception, but also isn't exactly an exception."

"I see. Then should I call everyone "Master"?"

"Huh?"

Taiyou fell into further confusion. This time he purposefully organized her words in his head and finally understood what she was trying to say. She was asking if people like the sister trio and Aoba who were in the same position as the master Kohaku should be called "Master".

"No, you don't have to. They'd get more and more confused if you called them that. And besides, you don't really want to call them that, do you?"

"If it is Master's order, then."

Taiyou could tell that she was probably implicitly displeased with the idea.

"Then you don't have to call them that. Just stick with calling only Kohaku "Master"."

"Okay!"

Pochi answered, putting more strength into rubbing his back.

"Master, I'll wash you off with water, okay?"

"Yeah."

As he nodded, Pochi reached out behind him for the looming showerhead. At that moment, he heard a cute voice of "Hyan!" and a wet slipping sound. The next moment, weight pressed against his back. At the same time, a squishy sound effect echoed throughout his head. A unprecedented sensation that he had never felt even once since the day that he was born. The sensation of having boobs pressed up against his back.

"S-Sorry Master! Are you hurt?"

"No I'm——"

About to say "fine", he felt a tingling sensation surge through his back. He wasn't sure why, but Taiyou felt like this was really bad. Without any particular reason, he felt that continuing on like this would be really bad. He halted the war-prepared objects with a forbidden move, then Pochi regained her posture, and with his back being washed, Taiyou was left imagining dirty things in his head until departing the open-air bath.

Once everyone's tempers had completely settled down, Taiyou returned to the room where everyone was. For some reason, the room was even gloomier than earlier. The wives resembled how they were after their bath earlier, but one step more depressed. Not understanding what had occurred, Pochi was at the sidelines in bewilderment.

"W-What's wrong?"

Taiyou inquired, predictably worried about their demeanor, but.

"Boobs..."

"Big breasts..."

"F cup..."

"Cow..."

"Calling her a cow is going too far!"

Amongst the various statements uttered by the sister trio and Aoba, Taiyou thrust into Aoba's last statement. Nearby the distracted girls, Kohaku was gazing up at the moon from the windowsill. At a single glance she seemed to be composed, but...

"What are you looking at, Kohaku-san?"

"The moon, look, tonight is a splendid moon, hoho."

"Yeah, you're right."

"Are ya familiar with the story about the moon's appearance resembling a rabbit pounding mochi, Master-Husband?"

"I think so, yeah."

"Perhaps if we could receive the rabbit's luck, those things would become somewhat more levelled."

"You too!?"

Taiyou burst in with wrinkled eyebrows and a sigh.

"And wait, judging by your reaction, it sounds as if you saw the whole thing. You peeked in the end, didn't you?"

"Nah, Master-Husband didn't seem like he wanted to be seen, so I risked mah life tah stop the peeking."

"It was worth risking your life for? Then why did——"

"I...read their presence and, experienced, it."

"That's seriously wasting your power! Wait, so why aren't you shocked; you ran away when you were invited to the bathhouse earlier, didn't you?"

"It's because I...made sure to...divert, my. Eyes."

"Your eyes have nothing to do with reading their presence!"

An unprecedented issue had arisen with Pochi's membership, and Taiyou was concerned for the future.

Chapter 105: Girls in Distress / The Females Sneak in at Night

"Hey, so are we really going to do it?"

Aoba, the person with the most common sense, asked in a low voice through the darkness. Surrounding her were the sister trio, Kohaku, Pochi, and even Hera. For some reason, everyone there except for Aoba had excited expressions on their faces.

"Of course."

"If we didn't then things would be inconvenient, you know?"

"We're going to be family from now on after all."

"I get that, but..."

Hesitating to talk, she looked in Kohaku's direction. Aoba's intuition was that she was the eldest of them all, so if there was any way to stop what they were about to do, it would be a word from her. But, as if they were broken, or perhaps they had never existed from the start...Aoba could not feel the slightest intent from Kohaku to stomp on the brakes.

"If yeh lost your nerve, then you can stay here. We'll just go."

"I haven't lost my nerve. I was just wondering if this is a good idea or not."

"Course it is, right everyone?"

""Yes!""

"I don't mean for everyone; I'm talking about Pochi-chan."

"Me?"

Pochi tilted her head in puzzlement. Even a small movement like that caused her voluptuous breasts to sway from side to side, but Aoba chose to ignore that.

"Yeah, are you really okay with this?"

"Yes; it is Master's order after all. And besides..."

"Besides?"

"I don't understand why...we're doing something like this, but I can tell that Master is thinking of me. So I'm completely fine."

"Huhu, ya know me well."

""""Cool!""""

"Hey, don't say things in such an amorous manner..."

Aoba sighed lightly, pushing back her bangs. This was because the three sisters' speech sounded like that of close friends.

"But but it'll be inconvenient unless we do it—, you get that too right Aoba-chan? You've experienced it after all."

This time Hera spoke. With the exception of Pochi, the females' gazes focused on the floating fairy.

"That's...right. Pochi-chan seems to be fine, so...I understand, I won't say anything anymore."

When Aoba said that, the girls exchanged glances and nodded once more, soon leaving the room in a swarm. There was a banquet hall beyond the sliding door, and another sliding door of the same making on the opposite side. When they opened that, there was a small room that was one-third the size of where the girls were. It was lit up by the faintest moonlight. There was a one-person futon, and Taiyou was there making quiet sleeping noises. Upon his insistence, males and females slept in different rooms at night. It seemed like the three sisters and others wanted to...sleep with him, but there was also Pochi and Shirokiyami, so Taiyou insisted that this was for the best. This was how the females ended up sneaking into Taiyou's solo room at night.

"I'll beh going in first."

Kohaku said with a muffled voice, stepping into the room first. Her careful movements were reminiscent of infiltrating an enemy base.

"H...mm"

"——Nnh!"

Taiyou turned over, letting out a voice. Kohaku stiffened up, taken aback by the sudden event.

"..."

Still stiff, she stared at Taiyou, and he once again started letting out quiet

sleeping breaths. Realizing that he hadn't actually noticed them, Kohaku took a relieved breath with a "pew". Resuming the infiltration, time passed by slowly as she approached Taiyou's side. Signaling to them with her eyes, this time the three sisters began sneaking into the room. Normally one would expect the sound of three people sneaking into somewhere would be three times louder, but this was not the case at all. With stealthy feet in perfect synchronization, even carelessness wouldn't make them any louder than Kohaku's infiltration. When they reached the area of Taiyou's feet...

"You there!"

""Eek!""

The three of them let out adorable screams, stiffening up in response to the sudden loud voice. Wondering if they had been found out, they timidly looked at Taiyou, but he was still sprawled on the futon with no signs of getting up.

"I can see you...there..."

He continued in a mumbling voice.

"He must be talking in his sleep."

Kohaku said, and the three of them were relieved. At length they resumed their synchronized stealth feet and made it to Kohaku's side. Next was Aoba. She made it to Taiyou's side without any trouble, arriving on the opposite side of Kohaku and the others. When she tried to give a signal to Pochi outside... Taiyou sprang up. Pushing aside the light-fabric futon, he rose up. The females standing there gave small jumps all at once. He must have found them out this time— that thought raced through each of their minds. But Taiyou, who was standing up, did not aim his eyes at them but instead wandered his unfocused eyes from left to right. The females were beginning to feel relieved that he was only half-asleep, but...Taiyou suddenly gripped Aoba's hand, squeezing it and pulling it towards himself.

"Kyaa!"

Aoba lost her balance and fell onto the futon. Meanwhile, Taiyou skillfully placed his body over Aoba, leaning on her. That position was just like pinning someone down.

"Aoba..."

"N-Natsuno-kun!?"

"I love..."

The sister trio and Kohaku held their breath watching the sight of Taiyou whispering into the ears of an immediately red-faced Aoba.

"..."

"..."

"..."

Tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock. The wall-mounted clock's sounds drifted through the room. Shortly afterward, Taiyou's sleeping sounds could be heard once again.

"So you're not going to finish speaking?"

Aoba lifted her voice loudly to the point of quavering, pushing Taiyou aside and getting up. Since Taiyou didn't seem to wake up as a result, Pochi was able to normally enter the room.

"Sheesh..."

Muttering discontentedly, Aoba looked at Taiyou. Suffering a disappointment and being forced to have something postponed made her state of mind very complicated.

"Well that's a shame."

""""Fight!""""

The senior wives encouraged Aoba. There were both happy and mixed feelings.

"He was going...to say, me."

Shirokiyami, who was nowhere to be seen earlier, was suddenly next to Aoba.

"Wha, why are you here?"

"What...are you, doing?"

Shirokiyami did not answer her question, instead hurling a question at them. The females exchanged glances, unsure of quite how to answer. Without hesitation, Pochi broke the ice.

"It's to make me kiss Master."

Hearing that, Shirokiyami looked at Taiyou, Kohaku, and Pochi who had answered in order.

"...Incest?"

She asked nonchalantly.

"That's indeed correct."

"That's wrong, right? We didn't have those intentions, right?"

"I didn't think that Yami-chan would come—, what now?"

Hera said as she flew through the air, starkly contrasting from the stealth feet of the sisters. Using that question as their opportunity, the females (with the exception of Shirokiyami) made a circular formation and began a strategy meeting.

"So maybe something like explaining the situation to her?"

"Even if we did, I don't think that she'd understand."

"Yeah, I don't think she'd accept our explanation unless we show her."

"Wasn't Aoba-chan good enough of an example?"

"Very true..."

"At this point it would probably be best to ignore Yami and progress."

"I think that's good—"

"Are you sure..."

As Aoba said that, everyone shot a glance at Shirokiyami. They were immediately startled. Shirokiyami had taken a katana out that hadn't been there earlier. In the silence, Shirokiyami gradually and gently composed a fighting stance. Somewhere between silence and movement. The next moment, Shirokiyami performed an "iai", drawing and sheathing her katana. The cutting edge glimmered in the moonlight, slipping right in front of the females. It did not cut anything up, since it attempted to slice Hera to no avail. Shirokiyami inclined her head, unsure of why nothing happened.

"...H, mm."

"W-What's wrong?"

Aoba asked. Could Shirokiyami have sensed it...?

"Everyone's gaze was focused...there, so I tried, cutting it."

The females gave sighs of relief. It seemed that she had not recognized it. Hera puffed out her chest.

"If she doesn't kiss Taiyou-chan, she won't be able to see me nor feel me, you see—"

"This just reconfirms it; as I thought, continuing like this will be bad for evra'day life."

"Why is that so?"

"If we don't do it that way—Huh, Master-Husband!"

Kohaku fell back. It was unusual for her to get this surprised. Taiyou was up all of a sudden, staring at everyone.

""""Y-You're awake?""""

"Yes I'm awake. Anyone would wake up when people are talking all around and performing iais and the like."

Taiyou looked at them with reproachful eyes. Receiving that glare, the females once again formed an encirclement.

"What now? Natsuno-kun woke up!"

"Umu, this's bad. If we were to currently face off against Master-Husband as a group, we wouldn't be able to take him down."

""""Should we start over?""""

"We 'ave no better plans, so yeah."

Kohaku said, and the females nodded. As the conversation inclined toward retreat, Shirokiyami silently cut in.

"Shall I...do, it?"

"You're going to actually do it?"

She nodded, got up, and moved toward Taiyou. In the darkness, the silently moving goth loli's form was reminiscent of a death god to the females' eyes. Taiyou was also the same way, a perplexed expression on his face having barely gotten up.

"What?"

"Don't...think badly of me."

"Why!?"

"Is it...not, fine?"

"Can you at least repeat that line twice!"

"A little bit."

It seemed like she tried, but it was a bit of a letdown for what was supposed to be an “enthusiastic” voice. Right after, she struck one of Taiyou’s vital points with the katana scabbard. The afflicted Taiyou fell on top of the futon right away, unable to move.

"W-What happened? My body won’t move."

"I struck the...secret, opening."

Shirokiyami said, giving the females a glance and then leaving the room, as if telling them to take their time. The females looked at one another, silently nodded, then also left the room with Pochi and Hera remaining inside. After shutting the sliding screen door, Taiyou’s screaming voice could be heard, but...

"This was indeed a good idea."

The girls decided not to pay it any heed.

Chapter 106: Girls in Distress / From Within the Car Window

The morning of the second day. The chirping of birds and the natural refreshing air blowing from outside the window woke up Taiyou in a pleasant manner. The moment he woke up, he expected someone to be sleeping by his side, but there was no one there. That wasn't a problem in and of itself, but it did feel a tad bit lonely.

"...That's probably too much to ask for."

Bitterly laughing at himself for unintentionally hoping for that, Taiyou got up and left the room. Entering the nearby banquet hall, almost everyone had gathered there. Shirokiyami was the only one not there.

"Good morning. You all woke up early, I see."

"Rising early is a general custom fah the elderly."

"And my house always had that custom."

""And we regularly do housework.""

The female wives answered sequentially, with Pochi being the only one who remained silent. She was hiding behind the table, peeking at what was going on. Grabbing the edge of the table with both hands and showing only half of her face was very much like something a puppy would do. When he was thinking of starting a conversation with her, Kohaku opened her mouth and made a proposal.

"Husband, let's go on a date."

"Date?"

"Indeed. We came this far to a tourist attraction, so it wouldn't beh refined tah constantly shut ourselves in here. Why don't we go see some scenic beauty or something?"

"Oh, good idea."

Nodding, Taiyou looked at the other females.

"You guys going too?"

""Of course.""

"Yeah, I mean there's no point being by myself."

The sister trio and Aoba answered immediately as if they had already come to an agreement.

As before, Pochi said nothing, still watching the proceedings with half of her face peeking out. Kohaku called the daughter-in-law.

"You shall come too, Pochi."

"— Uh-huh!"

As if she had been waiting for an invitation, or Kohaku had worded the invitation purposefully like an order, Pochi sprang up and stood up straight, promptly responding. Once that was decided, Kohaku gave a signal and the females began preparations simultaneously. With that being said, it seemed more like they had already discussed this prior to Taiyou waking up, as everyone carried only simple hand luggage and went outside all at once. Hera, who had been by his side since his waking up, approached the remaining Taiyou.

"Pochi-chan was definitely depressed."

"...Do you think so?"

"Yes indeed; she had the eyes of an abandoned puppy. You do realize this is your fault, right Taiyou?"

"It's my fault?"

"Yes indeed; you do realize that she became that way because you didn't kiss her, right Taiyou-chan—?"

Taiyou slightly furrowed his eyebrows in response. Even he thought that might be correct. After all, last night he had sent Pochi out of the room without kissing her. He had gently explained away the situation, sending her back to the females who were waiting for the kiss. So Hera was saying that that was why she was depressed.

"Why didn't you give her a kiss?"

"I bet Kohaku was the one who wanted to make it happen."

"That's spot on, but you still haven't answered my question, have you Taiyou-chan? Is there some reason why you haven't? Is it a family motto? Is it about the parent leaving a will? Or perhaps it's a religious principle from a religion?"

"Nothing like that."

"Then you gotta do it man—, move it move it go go! Besides, if you don't give her a kiss then I can't chat with Pochi-chan."

"You will at some point."

As if saying that the conversation was over, Taiyou gave an ambiguous answer and went outside. The females were all gathered around the car. This was not the wagon that they had used last night, but rather, a proper minivan that had carried them here. Shirokiyami, who had been absent earlier, was also there. She had been sitting on the roof for an unspecified amount of time. The sight of an attractive goth loli on a family car minivan was so irregular that Taiyou was still a bit perplexed, despite this being his second time seeing it. He approached the car and inquired, looking up at her.

"What exactly are you doing?"

"I got on...the, car. It's okay...I'll disappear so that...no one, sees."

"Alright."

Taiyou nodded, leaving her be. This was because he thought it was for the best. Her riding in the car versus her riding on the roof. The latter sounded more exciting. It sort of reminded him of a young child excitedly riding in the passenger seat for the first time.

"Alright, let us be off. Everyone get in."

The females nodded in response, filing into the car one after another. Kohaku, seated in the passenger seat leaned out the window and spoke.

"Ya gotta push it, Husband. Slowly."

"Alright, sure——I can't do something like that!"

Taiyou cut in after he had pushed the car of seven riding females, his sleeves rolled up.

"No, I think you just did?"

"You went a little far with the joke."

Aoba was exasperated and Hera was cackling.

"You never fail tah amaze, Husband. I expected you tah comment on it but I never thought that you'd actually have the capability level tah move it. You never fail tah amaze, Husband."

"Don't say that twice, and while we're at it, don't say that like some sort of big brother. And "capability level", what even is "capability level"?"

"That was 15 kilometers...per, hour."

Shirokiyami quietly conveyed from the roof. Her manner of speaking was the same as usual, but it had a tone of declaration to it.

"Did you seriously measure it!?"

"Yami-chan...sen, sor."

"There really isn't anything impossible for you, is there!"

"Well that was but a joke. I was going tah have you move the car once all seven wives had gathered, Husband."

Kohaku said moving to the driver's seat, while Taiyou hopped into the vacant passenger's seat.

"When that time comes, I'll do ya one better and carry the whole car."

Along with one of Taiyou's feasible jokes, this time around the car moved with the power of its engine.

Shortly after leaving the ryokan, the car climbed up a mountain road. There were twisting roads, some of which even curved one-hundred-eighty degrees, but with Kohaku's trained driving, it was a very agreeable drive. It was so comfortable that Taiyou, sitting in the seat with the highest chance of death, nonchalantly thought about how interesting Kohaku's change of personality was as soon as she gripped the handle. There was a gift shop when they had

come halfway up the mountain, so they decided to take a break and go inside. With the car stopped in the parking lot, the females got out and entered the shop one-by-one, while Pochi was the only one remaining in the car. Just like how she was in the morning, she was acting like a dog, peeking only half her face out of the window.

Taiyou called out to her, trying to invite her into the shop.

"Husband."

At that moment, Kohaku had suddenly emerged from the shop. It seemed that she had quickly bought a cone of soft serve ice cream, holding it in her tiny hands.

"What's the matter, Kohaku-san?"

"Ya gotta try a bit of this."

"Soft serve ice cream? Okay, sure."

He stooped down to where she was holding it, trying it just a little bit. Perhaps it was the effect of being on a trip, but it had a rich flavor and was pretty tasty.

"How is it?"

"Yeah, it's tasty. But I sort of get the feeling that the flavor is a bit different from your average soft serve ice cream; sort of like vanilla but not exactly vanilla..."

"Right, right!"

Kohaku said, grinning. Surveying her reaction as well as...the soft serve ice cream, for just an instant, something horrible ran through his imagination. Though he was pretty sure that they wouldn't do that sort of thing, he timidly inquired.

"...You didn't have any weird scheme with this, did you?"

"Ah, I've been found out."

"Hey!?"

"Glomp."

Indifferent to Taiyou's rough voice, Kohaku ate the soft serve ice cream with a

chomp.

"Huhu, I just shared an indirect kiss with Husband."

"That was your scheme!?"

Not minding his quip, Kohaku, who was now in a good mood from succeeding in an indirect kiss, returned to the inside of the store. After seeing Kohaku go inside, he turned toward Pochi, whose glittering eyes were visible from within the car. He thought to ask her if she had wanted to eat ice cream and was going to offer to buy some, but...

""""Taiyou-san!""""

This time the three sisters approached him. Just like Kohaku, they were holding soft serve ice cream. Not one ice cream per each of them, but instead all three of them gripping one ice cream.

"Umm...could you..."

"Try this real quick?"

"It's fine if it's just a little bit, okay?"

"You guys too? Let me ask just in case, but there's nothing strange inside the ice cream, right?"

""""No, just normal cheese soft serve ice cream!""""

"That's questionably normal! Oh, so it was cheese flavor..."

No wonder it was rich. While thinking that, he bit on the tip of the cranium-spiraling soft serve ice cream.

"Thank you!"

"Koto-chan, Kaza-chan, let's eat over there."

""Kay!""

With satisfied smiling faces, the sister trio went off pitter-pattering to a remote location, licking down the ice cream all at once. The image of them surrounding the soft serve ice cream and dragging their tongues across it was very erotic. Having the feeling that he shouldn't just stare at them, Taiyou regained his composure and turned back to Pochi. Her eyes were gleaming even

more than earlier. Taiyou was pretty sure that she was interested in the soft serve ice cream.

"Po——"

"Umm, Natsuno-kun."

An obstacle got in his way of talking to Pochi for the third time. This time it was Aoba's voice. He had somewhat predicted this, so he turned around thinking "Yeah yeah" to himself.

"Okay, I'll eat it so bring it here."

"Eh?"

But contrary to his expectations, Aoba wasn't holding soft serve ice cream. Actually, she wasn't holding anything in her hands at all. As Taiyou was perplexed by that, she nervously began to talk.

"Umm...there was limited lip balm...so..."

"Lip balm..."

Looking at it, her lips had become just a bit glossy. She had probably applied it to her lips and came to show Taiyou. It was Taiyou's misunderstanding; jumping to the wrong conclusion. The misunderstanding picked up speed with the likes of a snowball rolling down a slope.

"So you'll, eat it?"

Aoba said while red-faced and fidgeting. Of course there were no alternatives that existed within him, so placing his hands on her shoulders, he leaned forward just a tad bit.

Chapter 107: Girls in Distress / S and M

Saying “just a tad bit” and actually doing “just a tad bit” might be the sort of thing that influential entertainers do as a joke. And if it were between a male and a female, even more so. Just like how the only human beings who could trust the term “just the tip” were basically aliens, it would be impossible for an aroused man and woman to heed the words “just a tad bit”. The two of them kissing, Aoba’s hand wrapped around Taiyou’s shoulders, tightly grasping his clothing. Their now-rough nasal breathing began to tickle each other’s faces.

"Aoba."

"Natsuno...kun."

Breaking their kiss, he called her name. The girl’s face had become flushed, and she looked at him with entranced eyes. In a dreamy state of mind, she called his name.

"One more time."

"...Eh?"

"Is that alright?"

He asked, returning the gaze of her enraptured eyes.

"Well..."

Aoba made the face that Taiyou had hoped for. Touching her lips with a hooked finger, she became red and cast down her eyes. But she would also steal glances up at Taiyou’s face.

The desire to tell her that he had wanted to see her make this kind of face grew even stronger.

"....."

"....."

Taiyou, stimulated by a feeling of dominance, staring at her intently but saying nothing. Not rushing her, and not doing anything further if she didn’t approve of it. Letting off that mood, he waited for her to open her mouth.
...But.

Ultimately, he was a sixteen-year-old boy who had been a virgin up until a month ago. He was much too inexperienced with the art of teasing.

"Nggh!"

Aoba fidgeting in front of him was just so cute, and not being able to take it any longer, he stole her lips.

The second kiss, seeking more than before.

"Natsuno, kun?"

"Sorry. I wasn't thinking about your feelings, and I just couldn't take it anymore and forced it..."

"I-It wasn't forced, okay?"

"Huh?"

"I also wanted to—wanted you to do it! So it wasn't forced, got it?"

"Oh. But even so I really am sorry. That definitely was over-the-top."

"That too—"

"That too?"

The words that she had said rushed out from his mouth, but he swallowed them abruptly. He didn't even have to ask what she meant. He could of course have her say it, but as he was satisfied, he didn't press.

Enjoying a brief period of pleasant silence, Aoba broke the ice.

"...Hey, so are you also kissing the others?"

"Yeah."

Taiyou gave an immediate response.

"If anything, it's probably a bit severer with them. Kotone, Suzune and Kazane take turns so I have time to breath, but Kohaku prefers it to last until the break of losing consciousness, so I also have it just a bit hard."

"It's hard even on you, Natsuno-kun?"

"Yeah. Oh, and by hard I mean breathing; the kiss itself feels super nice...makes me happy."

"Is that so..."

Aoba lowered her face into Taiyou's arms, thinking a bit.

"Alright, I'll give it my best too."

"Give it your best?"

"Yeah; I'll give it my best to keep up with your pace, Natsuno-kun."

"No, you don't really have to give that your best..."

"But, if I lose consciousness then the kiss will end right in the middle of it all, right? Men don't like it when things end halfway, right? That's why I'll give it my best to last to the end!"

"Oh, I see."

As Aoba declared this from within his arms, something hot welled up from within Taiyou's chest. It was a little different from earlier; gentle, but hot enough to at least rival any other feeling.

Smooch.

He kissed her lightly, making a noise. The fact that Aoba had closed her eyes and accepted him just prior to the kiss made his chest feel hotter and hotter.

"Thanks, that makes me happy."

"Yeah..."

Aoba nodded. In that position for a while longer, they enjoyed the aftertaste. Not long after, Aoba slipped out of Taiyou's arms and stood up.

"Next time, I'll ask Mom and the others lots of questions, okay!"

Saying that with a red face, she dashed out of the area. She ran deep within the shop and disappeared.

"What exactly does she mean by "ask"?"

Taiyou muttered. He couldn't imagine in the slightest what sort of things she'd try to ask them. But he soon stopped thinking. Because after kissing Aoba, he didn't think something like that mattered. Rooted in place, Taiyou briefly enjoyed that lingering memory.

"Master."

"Uwa!"

Suddenly called from behind, he was so surprised that he thought his heart would jump out. The voice came within close proximity. Pochi had been gazing at him from the car that was no more than three meters away.

"S-Since when were you there?"

"I've been here the whole time?"

"O-Oh, right."

He wasn't sure why he asked that idiotic question. He became embarrassed as well.

"So you saw us the whole time?"

"Yes, in the arena seat."

"Uwah..."

Taiyou's face became a lavish red on par with Aoba's. Being seen...in itself, he didn't mind, but the fact that he had forgotten that there was already a spectator there and did all that in front of them was embarrassing. Because that showed just how much he had lost control of himself. He wanted to explain away the situation and have Pochi forget about what he had done, but that would be an unfulfillable dream.

"Master, what happened just now?"

"Eh?"

Pochi asked, immensely curious. Based on the question and what it entailed, Taiyou caught on, eager to make it seem like nothing had happened.

"By just now, do you mean what I did with Aoba?"

"Yes."

"How do you not know..."

For a second he thought that this was her way of playing bashful, but that wasn't the case. Kohaku probably had her all figured out, but here he was with Pochi, and her eyes seemed like they just genuinely were questioning. Not believing that it was possible, he asked her.

"We kissed, but do you really not know what a kiss is?"

"Yes, I know! That's the general name for the fish categorized in the Sillaginidae family under the Percoidei suborder from the Perciformes order. Otherwise, it's the English term "kiss" for the process of pressing one's lips against something or someone. Right?"

Pochi answered without hesitation. Her way of speaking conveyed her ability to immediately recite anything from memory.

"Straight from the dictionary as usual, I see. Well as you can see, we did the "press lips together" definition."
"..."

Pochi inclined her head, dissatisfied. Taiyou thought that was strange. For a second there he thought that she didn't know what the concept of a "kiss" was, but her knowledge did seem to cover that. Then why was she questioning what had transpired? This time, Taiyou was the one questioning things.

Chapter 108: Girls in Distress / Advancing with Him

"So why do you think that?"

"After all, Master Master is here."

"Mm? Oh, you must be talking about Kohaku-san."

Thinking about that briefly, Taiyou asked a question in return.

"Do you know what polygamy is?"

"Yes! The act of one man taking many women as his wives, or otherwise, the legal system of the aforementioned process. Some of the patterns seen in this system can take the form of sister polygamy as well as non-sister polygamy."

"Really?"

Taiyou said, deeply interested. He originally had asked her the question, but much to his surprise, he had just heard something new. Marveling at her usual unique way of answering, he asked another question.

"I understand what sisters and non-sisters mean, but you're saying that they each have their own unique categories?"

"Yes; it seems to have been very common for nobles and the upper class to indulge in the sister polygamy model. Among the emperors of Japan throughout history, around twenty-one of them apparently had harems comprised of sisters."

"I sure didn't know that. Incidentally, do you know which emperors did that?"

"Yes! Uhh...Emperor Kourei, Emperor Suinin, Emperor Keikou——"

In one go, Pochi read off some dozen emperors' names without hesitation.

"Wow, there were quite a few people like that, eh?"

Taiyou was impressed. He was familiar with some of those names, so although he wasn't sure whether this was true or not, it gave him the impression of sounding quite credible.

"Which means that since we have sisters in our group...oh wait, never mind;

there's also Kohaku and Aoba, so it's also a non-sister model in a sense."

Mumbling, he then looked at Pochi.

"You really know your stuff."

"That's because I studied together with Master! You see, Master was very knowledgeable and taught me a variety of things."

"And now I guess you're referring to Karina-san."

He could understand from the context that she was talking about her actual mother. And with that general flow, he asked Pochi various things. Pochi answered them one by one in a prompt manner. Taiyou soon discovered that her knowledge far surpassed that of his own. Almost as if there were an encyclopedia within her head, if you metaphorically hit it, it would reverberate— if you inquired something, it would soon • • • come up with a diligent answer.

(She's got to be at least more knowledgeable than Kohaku.)

Pochi knew enough of a variety of things to convince him of that. On the other hand, there were a lot of things that she didn't know. Despite the fact that she had knowledge of just about everything found in things like dictionaries and encyclopedias, when it came to things like slang, her knowledge was poor. And although she had the knowledge, she had apparently almost never actually experienced, saw, or interacted with most of these things. Taiyou thought that had to be a given, considering how long she had been locked up in that mansion along with Karina.

Once Taiyou's questions had settled down, this time it was Pochi's turn to speak.

"So I also kiss Aoba due to our unique situation."

"Okay, I understand!"

"You're satisfied now, are you..."

"Umm, Master?"

"Yeah?"

"Could you tell me...about the new Master?"

While saying that, she glanced in the direction of the shop. It would seem that she wanted to know about Kohaku.

"Kohaku-san, huh...Where do I even begin?"

"Master is Master's Master, right?"

"I'm still not used to that way of speaking...but yeah, that's right."

Taiyou answered Kohaku's question, reminiscing about life after meeting Kohaku.

"I think that Kohaku...is an incredible person."

"Incredible person?"

"Yeah; you know about the Eternal Littles, right?"

"Yes! They are women with genetic irregularities who have grown without gaining any secondary sex characteristics. Right?"

"I see; so that's how you describe them in dictionary terms. Well, that's right. It's not good to talk about a woman's age, but Kohaku is actually old enough to be our grandmother...possibly even great-grandmother. But nevertheless, she's young. She's young, she's smart, and her personality...can be quite sadistic but is overall good, and above all—she's a beautiful woman."

"You say she's a beautiful woman?"

"Yeah; you don't get what I mean?"

"I'm sorry...I can't really tell if she's beautiful or not."

"Nah; it's cool. I think that Kohaku-san is a tremendously beautiful woman. Her seductiveness...is just staggering. What's the word...bewitching, I'd say."

"Bewitching. Refined and captivating; a lovely appearance. Captivating. Her forms and mannerisms are amorous. Coquettish. She's that sort of person, then."

After chanting the general definitions like spells, Pochi nodded satisfactorily.

(Usually she isn't content with explanations though...)

Taiyou thought with a bittersweet smile.

"To tell the truth, I wonder why she chose someone like me. She's lovely to the point of being sexy, she's smart, and she somehow has a lot of personal connections and assets. Frankly, she must have seen loads of men greater than I am in her life."

"..."

Pochi didn't answer; she just fixed her eyes straight at Taiyou.

"However, no matter how much I think about it I don't understand, so I stopped thinking about it."

"You stopped?"

"Yeah; Kohaku-san is still by my side. So rather than think about things like that and trouble myself, I decided to better myself. Kohaku is a great woman. Even among all of the women I know, she's the very best and is unmistakably the best woman in the world. Just to be a good match with that very Kohaku-san...no, to become someone she can be proud of. I believe that's the kind of man that I need to become."

Thinking even now about Kohaku, he continued talking.

"That phrase she always says——I offer everything to you——I believe that I've gotta become the kind of man who's worthy of that phrase. No matter what."

"No matter what?"

"Yes, no matter what."

Taiyou nodded as if reconfirming his determination.

"You'll go to any lengths, huh..."

"It's because I've fallen in love with her."

"Uwa..."

Pochi's eyes sparkled in admiration. Looking at her, he reflected on the words that had just come out of his mouth.

Taiyou let out an unconscious sigh of relief. Pochi was rich in knowledge and

vocabulary, but the other clause was that she didn't have those things linked to actual life. So even if she knew about things that she hadn't experienced, she wouldn't realize when something was actually happening in front of her.

As evidence, she clearly hadn't realized what he had just done. If this had been seen by...someone else who was accompanying them, they probably would have quickly poked their nose into it.

——Having the nerve to speak fondly of her.

From his experience speaking with Pochi, she undoubtedly had the meaning of "speaking fondly" recorded in her head. If he were to ask her, she'd undoubtedly respond with "Speaking proudly in front of others about one's spouse or lover". But that wouldn't connect with what Taiyou did. Taiyou was saved by the girl Pochi. Taiyou sighed in relief. Relieved, he repressed his unintentional desire to go on about Kohaku deep in his chest and stared intently at Pochi. Seeing him suddenly become quiet, she once again hid half of her face beyond the car door. She had suddenly become rather adorable in his eyes.

No; ever since yesterday, every time he had seen her he had always thought that she was adorable. Getting to speak closely with her and coming to an understanding of what kind of girls she was, his thoughts only became stronger.

(Maybe if...I had known it would be like this yesterday...)

The image of Pochi, taken along to his bedroom and left there, floated in the back of Taiyou's mind. The thing that was sought from him.

When he thought about that...

"You've got to kiss—"

The fairy (devil) whispered into his ears.

Chapter 109: Girls in Distress / She Who Could Not Be Protected

"You gotta do it—, and I mean do it as in violate her—"

Hera whispered in his ears, following him around like a small insect. Based on her elated expression and tone of voice, she was like a demon that had just defeated an arch-nemesis angel. There was in fact no angel there, but he didn't hesitate. Used to this, Taiyou hit her, striking her into the ground. Also used to this, she powerfully bounded up and flew back to him.

"Hey, what are you doing?"

Grabbing the protesting fairy by the nape of the neck, he moved her in front of his eyes.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm just reminding Taiyou-chan about what he's forgetting to do, okay? Now then, hurry up and kiss Pochi-chan, and then I'll do what needs to be done with her."

"It's not that I forgot; I purposefully chose not to, okay? And what do you mean by "doing what needs to be done"?"

He shot a question back at her with cold eyes. He looked at her this way because she had said that Hera and Pochi, who had no way of contacting each other, had to accomplish something together, which sounded ridiculous.

Ultimately, it was exactly what Taiyou had thought.

"Playing ball, taking a stroll around the river beach——"

"Do you seriously intend to treat her like a dog!?"

"I promise it'll be fun, okay?"

"For you, maybe."

He said as he tried to hit her back down. She had nimbly dodged said attack, so in order to follow up with another attack——much like driving away a fly in

front of one's face, he waved his hands in a fluttering motion. Unable to see Hera, Pochi quizzically inquired.

"What are you doing, Master?"

"Eh? Oh, uhh, hmm...you know, shadow boxing!"

While thinking about how hard this was for him, he waved his hands frantically and made an excuse.

"Shadow boxing. Dodging an attack from an imaginary enemy while throwing a punch and so on; the process of moving by oneself to create attacks."

After she had recited the usual dictionary information, Pochi made a content face.

"So that's what you were doing!"

"Oh, so you accepted the explanation..."

"What a good girl...you are."

Hera pretended to be moved to tears.

"Seriously, Hera..."

"Master!"

Pochi raised her voice. He initially thought that she had called him, but he realized that her gaze was actually focused behind him.

Kohaku came up behind him. Kohaku was smiling, but with earnest eyes. These were not the eyes of her usual jokes or jests, but rather the kind of face she would make when having serious discussions.

"Listen Pochi, I'm going to be speaking with Husband right now. So be quiet and listen without getting in the way."

"Okay, understood!"

Nodding vigorously, she sealed her mouth with both of her hands. As usual, this was a rather childlike and adorable mannerism. Looking at her and nodding satisfactorily, she turned back to Taiyou.

"My Husband, I've heard the story."

"Story?"

"Indeed; the argument between Husband and Hera. I am of the same opinion as Hera; I think that it would be best for you to kiss this girl soon."

"..."

"Why are you refusing her in the first place, Husband?"

"Well..."

Taiyou hesitated. Now that he thought about it, even he wasn't so sure why he had been rejecting her. There wasn't exactly any reason; he had just partly refused her by spinal reflex.

"Is it that you resent the fact that I took in Pochi?"

"No, not that."

Promptly responding, he shook his head. He didn't have the answer as to why he rejected her, but he did have some composed ideas as to why.

"I think that you should do as you please, Kohaku-san. There's no reason to oppose your decisions."

"Then that's even more reason tah kiss her. Living under the same roof and not being able tah even have a conversation about the unseen is inconvenient."

"That's true, but..."

"Or do ya perhaps have another idea? If there's a better method then I'm all ears."

"Method..."

Taiyou parroted back in a flat tone.

He soon opened his eyes wide, astonished.

Objective, and method.

He was ordinarily the type of human to distinctly separate those two things. The most important thing was to fulfill the objective, and the methods were pliable—to rephrase, he was the type of human that would use any means at his disposal.

He had come this far doing that very thing. Others had said that very thing about him, and even he thought in that fashion about himself. To relate this to the current conversation, the objective was for Pochi and Hera to both be able to recognize and converse with each other. And there was only one method, which was for Taiyou and Pochi to kiss.

The previous him wouldn't have refused. After all, if there was only one solution, then no matter how much he worried or refused, in the end it all came down to the same thing.

That's why he was surprised. Why he hadn't done that immediately, and why he had continuously refused this time around. So he thought carefully about yesterday.

Taiyou Castle was broken, they made it to this hot spring area with Kohaku's driving, met with Pochi, and took her in. He carefully recalled that string of events.

And when he did so, he realized something.

Something very dull and laughable that made him want to be knocked down.

"...Haha."

Snorting, he lifted a smile of self-depreciation onto his face.

"What's wrong, eh Husband?"

"No, I just thought that I really am an idiot."

"What do you mean, Taiyou-chan?"

"For having pointless pride, you know."

"...I see."

Kohaku made an understanding face after a moment. Gazing at each other briefly, Taiyou felt that her eyes that had endured many years could see through everything.

——Maybe I really should have realized that.

——No, Kohaku-san, you did nothing wrong. Bad things only came about

because of my pride.

—The pride of a main provider may very well be a necessary thing.

—If the main provider were of a higher caliber.

They gave that exchange in an instant just by exchanging their gaze. That's all it took to convey the information both to the sender and the receiver. Feeling that way about it, both Taiyou and Kohaku were satisfied.

Or at least they were, but someone who didn't understand was nearby.

"Eh? Kohaku-tan, you got all that?"

"Yeah, even I have to do some soul-searching."

"It's my fault for not properly separating the objective and the method. There's no blame on you, Kohaku-san."

"Then how about declaring this a draw? We each take care from now on."

"Agreed."

Taiyou and Kohaku nodded to each other when saying that. And Hera had a gibberish look on her face as usual.

"I really don't understand what Taiyou-chan or Kohaku-tan are saying."

"Yeah?"

"But Taiyou-chan looks happy, so I won't complain."

"You're amazing in your own way."

"Well of course, as I am here for Taiyou-chan's benefit."

A highly versatile phrase. Thinking that, Taiyou laughed, and the other two women lifted the corners of their mouths up into smiles, laughing.

After the three of them had laughed at each other for some time, Kohaku called out to Pochi in the car.

"Pochi dear, get out of the car."

"Okay!"

Pochi obediently answered her call, opened the door, and got out from the

car. She walked to where Kohaku was.

It all happened in an instant.

In under a split second; in an amount of time faster than the human sense could pursue. This was made possible by tagging along with Shirokiyami—getting accumulated to bloodlust.

"Kohaku-san!"

Sensing the impending danger quicker than anyone else, Taiyou yelled loudly and stepped in front of the girls to protect them.

Zudododododododo—

The sound of gunfire echoing, and something aimed at Taiyou, flying toward him in succession. Those things hit his body, which ignored the laws of physics, sending them powerlessly to the ground.

The lead bullets fell trickling onto the earth.

"W-What is it?"

In response to the quick turn of events, Kohaku's voice sounded out, losing her composure for once. On the other side of things, Taiyou was also taken aback, but with the Long-Distance Nullification skill and the experience from fighting with Shirokiyami, he was comparatively calmer.

"Please don't move, Kohaku-san. You'll be safe if you stick behind me."

"...Alright."

He could sense someone taking a deep breath behind him. Being as amazing as she always was, Kohaku had swiftly recovered and was attempting to regain a sense of composure.

That was soon shaken by yet another grand-scale impact. Something exploded in front of them. Not an impact, but a flash-emitting explosion.

Flash • Bang!

"Kuh!"

Momentarily disoriented, Taiyou looked back and hugged Kohaku closely so as to protect her. That way, he could protect her no matter what happened. He

made various predictions, simulating how to deal with them in his head. But no matter how much time passed, nothing came their way. Still embracing Kohaku, sight gradually returned.

""""Taiyou-san!""""

"Natsuno-kun!"

Overhearing the racket, the sister trio and Aoba emerged from the shop, protected by Shirokiyami.

"Taiyou-chan! Pochi-chan isn't here."

"What!"

Hearing Hera's words, all present were in astonishment.

Chapter 110 Mystery of the Girl / Domestic Telephone Call

Taiyou surveyed the area in shock.
Just like Hera had said, Pochi was nowhere to be found.

"Natsuno-kun! What happened?"
"Pochi went missing."
""Pochi-chan did?""
"She wasn't...kidnapped, was she?"

Kohaku asked as if she were murmuring, and the females caught their breath.
Everyone immediately focused on what was in front of Kohaku.
The lead bullets, sprawled near Taiyou's feet.

"What's that?"
"Gun ammunition...that of a, machine gun."

Shirokiyami answered, and Aoba became even more astonished.
"Wha, so it's the real deal? So then what we heard just now was gunfire."
"Yes...Also, flashbangs, were used too."
"Flashbang hand grenade n' machine gun...What in th'world does this signify?"
"Hey, do you know where they took her to?"

Taiyou asked Shirokiyami, having had numerous interactions with her in the past where she displayed the ability to sense presences, entrusted her with his hope.

"All I know is that...it's that, way."
She said, pointing silently in the direction of the mountain. Come winter and it would be a crimson color, but right now it was still an ordinary mountain.
"So you don't know anything other than the direction..."
Taiyou wondered what he had expected, racking his brains.
"Let's search for her, Taiyou-san!"

"She was kidnapped just now, so they shouldn't have gone that far."

"If we all search, we'll find her."

The three sisters proposed encouragingly.

"That's right."

"Let's split up and search. I'll try chasin' them by car along the road. After all, the chances that they're also usin' a car are very high."

"Then I'll search areas that don't have a road. Could you come help too?"

Ha said looking at Shirokiyami, and she silently nodded, but...

"But...we can't contact, each other."

"You didn't bring a cell with you?"

"We're out of, range."

She said, and the girls one-by-one checked their smartphones.

"Mine's also outta range."

"Mine too."

Kohaku and Aoba made troubled faces one after the other.

"Tch, what should we..."

""""Please leave it to us!""""

The three sisters said in loud voices, their faces brimming with confidence.

Taiyou sprinted through the forest. He carried Kotone, the eldest of the three sisters on his shoulders and was running, weaving his way through the trees. He surveyed his surroundings restlessly while sprinting. Every time something moved in his field of vision, he would come to a halt and check, breaking into a run again in disappointment.

The only ones here were Taiyou and Kotone. The Natsuno family split into four groups scattered about in various parts in search of Pochi.

Taiyou and Kotone.

Kohaku and Suzune.

Shirokiyami and Kazane.

And Hera.

Splitting into four groups in that manner, they were desperately searching for

Pochi.

"Taiyou-san, this is from Kohaku-san. She says that the smartphone waves have been restored."

"Whereas it seems like we still can't use ours; what about Shirokiyami?"

"She also still can't."

"Alright. Then how about you guys? You're considerably separated from each other, but..."

"Everything's fine; I can also hear Suzune-chan and Kazane-chan's voices"

"Got it; then I'm counting on you to hold out a bit longer."

"Understood!"

Taiyou and Kotone, who were on their own in the middle of the mountains where no electronic signals could reach, were using the sister trio's telepathy for communication. The girls were conversing via telepathy, so due to having to vocalize the conversation there was usually some time lag, but this time around they seemed to be reaching them with precision.

Searching the surroundings whilst sprinting, Taiyou felt a pang of regret.

"Damn it; if I just hadn't wasted my time worrying..."

"What do you mean by wasting your time worrying?"

"I mean that I should've kissed Pochi last night. If I had kissed her, she would have been able to directly use Hera..."

"Oh, because once you kiss, Hera-chan is able to figure out their whereabouts, right."

"Damn it."

"Another word from Kohaku-san. She went all the way back to the ryokan but couldn't find her. She says that she'll scout the perimeter and then return here if nothing comes up."

"Tell her to report back just in case."

"Understood...Ah, this time it's from Yami-chan. There's no trace of any people within the sphere of a one kilometer radius."

"Tch."

Their search fruitless, Pochi was nowhere to be found. Feelings of unease grew worse, burning Taiyou's chest.

"This is from Kohaku-san."

"Did she find her!?"

"No, not that. Umm,[Being kidnapped implies that they won't harm 'er; remember how there were no signs o' wounds at the crime scene?], is what she said."

The manner of speaking that came out of Kotone's mouth had an air of jest. Taiyou was put into a delicate mood of wanting to laugh, but not quite being able to laugh.

"That may be so, but that doesn't mean that we can just relax, right?"

"Umm[There was no bloodlust...nor malicious, intent.], she says."

This time it was Shirokiyami; with Kotone conveying Shirokiyami's unique way of speaking, it definitely had some sort of peculiarity (in a good way) to it..

"She also said[So...I was late in noticing, it. Sorry.]"

"No, it's not your fault."

Taiyou began speaking as if he were in a phone conversation with Shirokiyami, Kohaku, and the others.

"[You're no different, Husband; even assuming that ya had kissed, that wouldn't necessary mean that this coulda been prevented.]. We share the same opinion."

"Still..."

"[Natsuno-kun, stop worrying and search more earnestly.]"

"Ngh"

Taiyou was at a loss He felt as if Aoba were right in front of him reprimanding him.

All of a sudden, they began converse in a natural flow. Although it was indeed a bit of a verbal message game-like thing being intercepted between the three sisters, eventually, it began to feel like using a phone or computer for a three-way conversation. Initially it was slightly uncomfortable, but eventually, that feeling went completely away.

"All things considered, this situation's odd."

"What's odd about this situation?"

"Their mannerisms."

"Mannerisms? What about their mannerisms?"

"Eh? Natsuno-kun, are you seriously asking that?"

"Of course I am..."

"This was...the criminal act of a, pro."

"Yeah, cause they came out with stuff like machine guns and flashbang grenades."

"Ain't that right?"

"...?"

"So what I mean is, why did they go to such lengths to abduct her? I don't know whether or not they're pros, but isn't doing all that to abduct one girl a bit over-the-top?"

"...Ah."

Taiyou came to a stop while still shouldering Kotone. His shocked expression was proof that he finally understood the situation.

The event in which he became involved in order to save the three sisters, and the days in which he continuously challenged Shirokiyami.

Those things had numbed his sensitivity.

There was of course the fact that he had nullified the machine gun bullets with[Long-Range Nullification], and although he was busy feeling remorse for Pochi being kidnapped right in front of him, he hadn't realized a fairly important thing. Aoba's intuition was normal in that area. Bringing along that much equipment to abduct one girl was odd in the first place.

"You're right; whether it be the speed of their withdrawal or that they escaped from Shirokiyami's vicinity, it really was a strange situation."

"Taiyou-san, you hadn't actually noticed that?"

"You noticed that, Kotone...oh wait, that's to be expected, huh."

"Uh, yeah..."

"But why? Why did they do something like-"

Taiyou pondered, standing still. In turn, alarm bells rang in his head. The sense that something terrible was about to happen sprouted up.

"Taiyou-san, first we need to find Pochi-chan."

"Y-Yeah, you're right."

Becoming aware of Kotone, Taiyou took a step, resuming the search for Pochi. When he did that,

"Taiyou-chan! I found her!"

Hera suddenly appeared in front of them. The only one who had been working solo, she had used warping to come and notify them.

Chapter 111 Mystery of the Girl / Mysterious Defeat

"Where is she!?"

"I'll take you to her."

Hera turned around midair, changing course and flying off. Taiyou kicked off from the ground, following her. Their ferocious speed was enough to blow wind toward them, with Kotone holding back her hair with her hands as she spoke to Hera.

"Hera-chan, I'll notify everyone, so tell me where the place is and where she is!"

"Alright! It's in the area ahead once you've cleared these woods."

Once Hera had told her that, Kotone conveyed it among the sisters via telepathy.

Taiyou, still sprinting, at length found the target once he had slipped out of the forest for the first time, just as Hera had said.

A group of brawny men were gathering around one wagon. Pochi was already set up on the wagon, mouth gagged and hands tied up. She reacted to seeing Taiyou, but was in a situation where her pressed-down shoulders prevented her from moving.

"Pochi!"

Calling her in a loud voice, he stopped when he was around ten meters away from the wagon. This was a distance from which he could immediately burst in and commence fighting; the distance to commence fighting that his body had learned from his fights with Shirokiyami.

Taiyou lowered Kotone down, setting her behind him.

Then he realized something when he took another look at his opponents.

Among the burly men, only one was clearly an existence of a different nature.

There was a crimson outline of a woman.

Though she was a crimson outline, she was by no means a sweet flower. There was a fierce smile in her narrow eyes that was reminiscent of a carnivorous animal, and while glamorous, she surpassed Taiyou's height at around 180

centimeters.

She was emitting an extraordinary atmosphere from her entire body.

"We couldn't get away, huh."

The huge woman looked at Taiyou, a smile showing on her face. Not self-depreciation; in stark contrast to her words, it was a manner of speaking of someone enjoying the situation.

They had no intention of running away. Taiyou just got that feeling.

"But wow, to think that you got here first instead of Shirokiyami. I guess you'd better blame it on bad luck. What do you think, boy?"

She asked in a collected manner, and paying it no heed, Taiyou interrogated her.

"Who are you guys, and what was your objective with kidnapping that girl?"
"Oh, did I seem like the type of person who spills the beans?"

The woman asked in return, snickering.

"Well, this is the right situation for it, plus it's not like I lose anything by asking."

"That's also true. Well, you're free to ask, but I have no intention of answering."

"Then, where do you plan on taking her?"

"That's basically the same as the other questions. How about you use your head a bit when asking questions?"

She said in a challenging tone, snickering as usual. Taiyou was a little bit sullen.

"...What about the color of your panties?"

"Red."

"And further up?"

"The same."

"Is there hair, or do you shave?"

"Is having none a given?"

The large woman stifled her laughter. Her way of laughing was not a derisive laugh of bloodlust, but now had a happy nuance to it.

"And?"

"And what?"

"I mean, what else? For starters, I don't mind giving you about eighty points, but not having any questions beyond that to broaden the conversation means failure, boy."

"..."

Taiyou closed his mouth. He had just been trying to throw a screwball into the day after tomorrow and confuse her, so he didn't continue.

"You really aren't popular, are ya?"

The woman made a slightly exasperated expression. Crossing her arms and sighing, her breasts that were a size larger than Pochi's wavered up and down. Taiyou wasn't able to retort.

"That's not true! Taiyou-san is staggeringly popular; he plans to eventually make a harem of seven, okay! You're an idiot if you don't understand Taiyou-san's appeal."

In place of Taiyou who couldn't retort, Kotone lost her temper and objected. She couldn't handle her harem king being denounced.

"Hey, seems like you're pretty good at brainwashing."

"Many thanks for the compliment. Since we're on the topic of harems, wanna discuss true love?"

Using the time that Kotone had made for him when she had cut in, a somehow-refreshed Taiyou tried bringing up a different topic. A keyword that he had found when searching up harems on the internet a bit earlier. He had at that time procured the opinions of the people who discussed things like one-husband-multiple-wives and one-wife-multiple-husbands, so this was a topic that could open up the conversation in many ways.

"Seems like a topic that would spread the conversation out boundlessly, but no can do."

"Why?"

"Because it would be a waste to have that conversation end in the middle; if we had time I'd like to have the both of us discuss it unreservedly while having a drink."

"There's no time?"

The woman twisted the corner of her mouth into a broad grin as Taiyou tilted his head.

"Well, I guess it's about time."

"Eh?"

"I mean that I think your guys' reinforcements should be here pretty soon. You bought time because you were waiting for their arrival, right?"

"You knowingly went along with it?"

"Well yeah, sure."

Taiyou was astonished. Just as she had said, he had intended to buy time until the girls had come together.

He felt shocked that not only had she caught on to that, but knowingly played along.

What's the meaning of this?—As he thought that, just as she had said, Taiyou's reinforcements arrived.

"I sure did."

Kohaku's car came from the opposite side, rushing with Shirokiyami and the small-framed Kazane hanging from it.

Taiyou and company had surrounded the woman and her subordinates on three sides. Taiyou, Kohaku, and Shirokiyami were in front, while Kotone, the other sisters, and Aoba were standing a bit further away.

In response to being surrounded, the burly men readied battle stances, but she was composed, her arms crossed.

Alarm bells rang in Taiyou's head. His intuition warned him that something wasn't right.

"Don't tell me...it wasn't that you couldn't run away, but that you intentionally chose to not run away?"

"Huh, whaddya mean, Husband?"

"Wow, kids' heads these days are surprisingly perceptive. Intuition's good too."

The woman gave a reply in an amused manner as if implicitly saying "That's right".

"Well, rather than fleeing and being traced, it's better to keep our objective

fulfilled and have enough time to flee after we turn the tables on our pursuers, don'tcha think?"

"Flee...or even turning the tables, you have the confidence to pull that off?"

"I do, yes."

Nodding, the woman's big breasts shook again.

"The only one who can put up a fight among you is you yourself, right boy? I couldn't figure out even by investigating why a mere student suddenly became drastically stronger, but it's not enough strength to make the situation hard-pressed. Lining up a wall of flesh and chopping things up should finish ya right away."

Taiyou stiffened up...intentionally.

"Even if I get cut I'll still move right to you, got it?"

"Then once you've moved to me I'll just cut ya again; this has to have some effect on you right?"

"This?"

"Katana. Guns didn't seem like they worked after all."

"Ngh"

"Special disposition? Or maybe some sort of technique?"

"It's God's divine protection."

"Sorry, but it's not really in my nature to believe in a god or buddha."

"How about chi or psi?"

"I encounter them quite often in this line of work."

"I see."

"Now then, shall we? If you decide to let us go then I'll fawn on you favorably, so what'll it be?"

As if answering to that line, the burly men took one step forward.

"If you'll be so kind as to leave that girl, then we don't mind overlooking this."

"Well, of course you wouldn't."

Things were effectively ruptured. The air between the two began to grow tense.

They glared at each other. Taiyou's group gradually closed in, while the men advanced forward so as to push them aside.

In the midst of the air of the critical situation, Taiyou started off by playing his trump card.

"Shirokiyami!"

"Okay..."

The goth loli girl readied her long katana, aiming at the men and diving in. The world's strongest girl who could sever steel and rock and even produce afterimages. Taiyou had absolute confidence in that power. After all, he had realized that with none other than his own body.

However— —

"I already told you, didn't I?"

Paying it no heed, the huge woman sneered.

"That the only one who can stand a decent chance is yooou, by yourself."

The moment she said that, the area in front of where Shirokiyami leaped broke with the likes of the Red Sea. The men stepped to either side, making a straight path.

One girl appeared there, standing before Shirokiyami, poised to draw her sword.

Still gripping the katana, Shirokiyami's movement stopped. Her usual expressionless face was painted with astonishment.

The girl coldly asserted.

"So are you going to kill me?"

"Big...si, s."

She had her usual manner of speaking, but said her name awkwardly and still had a look of astonishment on her face. In front of the girl, her older sister, Shirokiyami weakly crumbled down.

Taiyou looked at that scene with shock. In his mind, Shirokiyami was absolutely undefeatable; the most powerful existence. He had decided that there was no existence in the world surpassing her own.

That impression crumbled with much ease. In response to the appearance of this supposed blood relative, Shirokiyami had completely lost the will to fight, becoming unable to battle.

"It's not over yet, you guys!"

The huge woman gave a command, and the burly men rushed forward simultaneously.

Not at Taiyou; at his wives with the exception of Shirokiyami.

Screams rose one by one. The females were defeated by the men's attacks.

Taiyou was left standing alone within but an instant. The sister trio, Kohaku, Aoba. Everyone was assaulted in one go, and when Taiyou was hesitating figuring out who to protect, everything had ended.

Looking at Taiyou perplexed by the situation, the woman made a ferocious grin that resembled a carnivorous animal.

"As planned, we can now take our time escaping. Right?"

He looked at the woman's prideful victory face, the fallen wives, and the floor-sunk Shirokiyami.

"Just who are you?"

Taiyou asked with a quavering voice. He had become lightly panicked enough to ask something as meaningless as a simple question.

"Come to think of it, I never did introduce myself, huh?"

The woman still had a smile on her face, but aimed a cold gaze at him.

"The name's Juunishima Anna; remember it."

Chapter 112: Mystery of the Girl / I'm Sure They'll Forgive Me

"Juunishima..."

Astonished, Taiyou certainly did not think in the slightest that he would hear that name here.

Juunishima. An island with the third-largest area in Japan, possessing a population of a million people while for some reason being classified as a village; a bizarre municipality. According to what he had heard, the village headmen, the Juunishima family had control over the island's political authority. This province, with feudal lords that lead a population of a million people had developed in an individual manner like the Galapagos, or otherwise was a region that was left behind.

He had gotten involved with Juunishima prior to this due to the sister trio, but they had reached an amicable settlement and had assumed that they wouldn't meet again with the island's people. To think that he would once again be coupled with a person with that name in this fashion.

Grimacing, terrible guesses floated through Taiyou's head.

"Why has Juunishima...Have they seriously came for Kohaku-san and everyone because of the blood soul——"

"Wrong, thaaat's not under our jurisdiction."

"Then...what is it?"

Through the wagon door that was left slid open, Anna left her long feet dangling, sitting down on the seat. This was the kind of behavior prone to vulgar mannerisms, but it was an atmosphere that fit the person herself very well.

"What actually was under our jurisdiction from the beginning was this girl."

Saying that, Anna put an arm over Pochi's shoulders.

"Her?"

"That's right. Strictly speaking, it would be more correct to say that we were searching for this girl's mother. Back from ten years ago."

"For Karina-san? Why would you-"

"Because this girl wished for it."

"Are you saying that she's not her mother?"

"When we began searching, this child was still in the belly, after all."

Recalling Pochi's situation, he was taken aback. Around the time when Karina had been washed ashore, Pochi hadn't yet been born.

"Even so, what exactly are you saying about her?"

"A candidate for the next family head; to make her an emblem."

"For Youran?"

"Ohhh...?"

At the name that he had mentioned with his spinal reflexes, Anna, who had been laughing until then, suddenly narrowed her eyes.

—Slipping up, Taiyou cursed his own carelessness.

The fact that Youran and Taiyou were connected was probably not known amongst the Juunishima. Whenever she would show up where Taiyou was she would always sneak in, sporting a disguise that resembled what she called prosthetic makeup. Not only that; she initially had given an alias name known as "Yurikago".

Above all, she...had said that. She had even requested him to do things like kill her if necessary before anything was detected. With Taiyou unconsciously blurting out her name, it felt like everything had been exposed.

He prayed that she would ignore the name that he unintentionally let out, but Anna didn't overlook that.

"If you know that girl...I seee."

Anna was content after thinking about it briefly. Urging himself not to reveal any more faults, Taiyou proceeded to forcibly change the topic.

"More importantly, why Pochi? What's the reason why she's going to be a candidate for the next family head?"

"It's her lineage, duh?"

"Lineage?"

"That's right; this child is descended from the Juunishima originator, you see."

While Taiyou was astonished over the shocking truth, Anna laughed derisively, looking up at the sky.

"Some ten years ago, one female escaped from Juunishima. The woman was equivalent to the legal wife...as far as status, and was pregnant with the head's child. Thanks to that child, the woman had a higher amount of authority, but for whatever reason that woman vanished before the child was born."

"Karina-san did?"

"I learned of that name just yesterday. Until then, to us, she was always Suzuki Yuko."

"What do you mean...Ah."

"That's right; the woman was in hiding for a long time. Using an alias, not appearing before people. She didn't even get a birth certificate for the child that she had birthed. The only information gleaned from the people from the surroundings was about a young woman. That's why we would always search but never reach that place."

"Then...wait."

Taken aback, Taiyou fearfully looked at the fallen Kohaku.
The reason why Anna was here, right now, was—

"That's right; we cast a net, you see. For Karina...Suzuki Yuko. She was skilled at continuously cutting off her whereabouts from the public, as well as erasing her footprints prior to her death so that we couldn't reach her even if she had died. No matter how much we searched, there was no way to search for her from our side. However, if reversed, it was possible."

"You cast a net, waiting for the other party to come out——"

"That's exactly right; well, it's like the story of the Stump and the Rabbit. Waiting in vain, the people in charge did change several generations, however."

Anna said, smiling broadly.

"In that sense we have gratitude for you all; because you investigated regarding this girl, because you did us the favor of searching for Suzuki Yuko, we were able to fulfill our task of ten some years. I feel like sending you a letter of commendation, if anything."

"Meanwhile, I feel horrid."

"Well, it wasn't your guys' fault. You did truly brilliantly in your performance of

investigating that woman; if we hadn't been involved then that would've been a case of the very best move that I'd even want to teach to my subordinates. You were just unlucky."

"...Taking Pochi, what do you plan to do taking her with you?"

"Said I'd make her into an emblem, duh? In short, having her do things like ride in a palanquin, you know, the political kinds of stuff. Just like that implies, we'll treat her courteously like a princess so relax."

"..."

Grimacing, he shot a glance around him.

The four girls: Kotone, Suzune, Kazane, and Aoba were fainted in agony, occasionally leaking pained moaning voices. Upon reaching Kohaku, she was lying face down, not moving an inch.

One step away from those girls, Anna's subordinates were enclosing them, actually in a situation of taking hostages.

Shirokiyami, whom he had hoped to be his joker, was made powerless, and had disappeared unawares. No matter how much he looked around, he couldn't locate her appearance anywhere.

Blocked in every direction, this was a situation in which Taiyou had absolutely no alternative.

"Now then, what shall you be doing?"

"What shall I be doing? Are there even two or three routes that I can choose from?"

"So you can speak coldly after all. To think that a boy like you could make such a voice."

Slightly surprised, Anna said shortly afterward in an impressed voice.

"Relatively the kind of guy I am, I'd say."

"I didn't expect that."

After being impressed, her voice had changed to a guarded tone. She slightly moved her body, hiding Pochi.

Whenever rage occurred within Taiyou, by nature his emotions would turn around and calm him down. Right now was no different, and his voice became composed only due to becoming filled with indignation.

However, this being her first meeting with him, Anna seemed to have decoded it differently. Even if he had to abandon the girls, Taiyou would recover Pochi. She wasn't sure how serious he was, but since the possibility ran through her head, she inserted herself in front of Pochi.

That was favorable in many ways, so taken in, Taiyou carelessly took a light step forward.

It was a bluff. However, her voice began to sound slightly impatient for the first time since meeting him.

"Wait, so do you not care what happens to the girls?"

"If I apologize then they'll forgive me; I'm sure of it."

"Even if it's made clear that you abandoned them?"

"Yeah, if I apologize."

Taiyou continued to take light steps across the unpaved ground.

At first it was nothing but a bluff, but gradually, he began to feel that this was definitely the way to go.

Even he behaved recklessly here, Kotone and the others as well as Kohaku would surely forgive him. If anything, they were the kinds of girls who would get angry at him for abandoning her.

(What about Aoba; she might not be okay with it. Actually, taking her parents into consideration, they're definitely on this side . . . probably.)

Thinking of Aoba, Taiyou felt something steadily growing in his chest.

A natural smile unfolded from the corner of his mouth.

Anna's face became stiff. She appeared to be atmospherically pressured by Taiyou's smile.

"You don't seem to be lying, huh..."

"Apologizing itself is surprisingly difficult, though."

"This is unexpected. You guys!"

As Anna gave the command, the burly subordinates took Taiyou's wives hostage and gathered in front of the wagon, forming a wall of people.

Taiyou had said that he would abandon them, and she also felt that he wasn't lying. Even so, she would undoubtedly use whatever could be used. During the time that the men held the hostages and were defending, the wagon

door was shut, suddenly taking off and leaving elsewhere.

As they left, his eyes met with Pochi looking out from the window. Gagged, her wet eyes pointed toward him, seeking help.

His chest stinging, guilt and anger equivalent to that rose up.

He gathered them up and shoved them deep within his heart.

Right now, was not the time.

While thinking that, he lightly, lightly walked.

Facing the human wall, walking toward the burly men.

The men all had eyes of resolution; eyes that conveyed their decision of being prepared to stop the remaining Taiyou, even at the risk of their own lives.

A valiant effort from the enemy, is probably what Kohaku would have said.

Inhaling and lightly gripping his fists, he freed his heart.

The next instant, Taiyou, who had ferociously broke in, thrust his fists into one of the men's faces, drilling him, and he was flown some ten meters away.

That, became the signal for the outbreak of war.

Chapter 113: Mystery of the Girl / Smashing Regrets

In the car were Anna and Pochi, as well as a young male driver. Saying nothing, a bizarre silence drifted over the three of them.

Eyes directed outside of the window, Anna was for some reason gazing at the scenery that flew by at high speeds. Carrying Pochi like this to the next transportation point was the current job, but the pieces that she had on hand were fairly depleted. She was thinking of how to reliably transport her. While her thoughts were going around, the image of Pochi faintly reflected from the window glass.

Restrained and gagged, she was staring straight at Anna with fearful eyes. Even when their eyes met through the window, she did not avert her eyes. Anna turned back, stretching out her hands.

"——Mmph"

Frightened, Pochi harshly shut her eyes and cowered. This was the fear from predicting that something would be done to her, that violence would come down on her. Thinking from the standpoint of a captive, it could be said that this reaction was a given; if anything, Anna thought that the weird thing was earlier when she was keeping eye contact. With a faint smile, she put her hands on the gag and removed it.

"...Eh?"

Astonished, Pochi appeared to have not at all thought that the gag would be removed. Even after she was able to freely speak, still astonished, she remained quiet and stared at Anna. Anna crumpled up the gag and tossed it carelessly into the backseat. After seeing that, Pochi timidly asked.

"W-Why..."

"Why what?"

"Why, did you release me? Didn't you abduct..."

Anna chuckled; not the kind that she had directed toward Taiyou, but a laugh that had almost no hostility felt from it.

"Did you not hear that conversation earlier? We don't really intend to harm you. If anything we'll welcome you courteously and have the privilege of returning you home."

"Courteously...?"

"That's right; I said we'd put you up in a palanquin, then make you the head in name, and unlike most groups who'd actually try to control you, we'd become your subordinate, see. We'd generally listen, and we can't rebel in the first place. Rather——"

Saying that, this time she meaningfully grinned.

"So that the thought of retaliating later on doesn't even cross your mind, it's pretty much necessary that we butter you up right now, see."

"Umm..."

"What is it?"

"In that case, return me to where Master is. Because it's no good if I'm not by Master's side."

"That's not possible; this can't be decided by your own discretion."

"No way..."

"...If you insist on saying that you want to be with your Master, then after you've reached the island and become the head, you can invite them over or whatever you want. Once ya get power in your hands it's whatever you want to do, see."

Hearing Anna's talk, Pochi became despondent.

Anna didn't know her very well; she knew nothing about her other than the information that came in when the woman named Azumaya Kohaku had moved.

What Anna did know was that she had been named Pochi, and the fact that she had been half-imprisoned by Suzuki Yuko.

(She's pretty smart in that regard. Moreover...)

Secretly thinking that, Anna gazed at Pochi.

Silence briefly drifted by, but this time Anna was the one who broke the ice.

"I won't bring you back, but once we get over there then I'll let you call your Master or something. Make do with that, okay?"

"Call...you said?"

"Yeah; cause if you do that then it won't conflict with my job. My job is to safely take you back, and from the orders that I've been given, if I can at least do that then I can do whatever I want afterward. As long as I determine that it's necessary, kay?"

"Necessary..."

"So if you'll come along with a good feeling, I can definitely let you do a phone call."

"Elder Sister..."

The young male driver murmured, and Anna glared at him through the rear-view mirror.

"Shut it; if you say something I'll • • , okay?"

"Mkay."

The man quieted down, but a delicate atmosphere floated through the car.

"Umm, why are you doing that for me?"

"There ain't no reason."

"But, your face earlier. It seemed like it was kind of pained."

"...Hah."

Anna laughed scornfully.

"It's not painful, see, though it's not like I can't sympathize."

"Sympathize?"

"That's right; we are relatives after all; nothing wrong with that much, right?"

You're the Juunishima's head's daughter, but my name's also Juunishima."

"Are you perhaps my older sister?"

"Unfortunately, no."

Anna grinned; she had returned to her usual expression.

"I'm actually your niece."

"Eh?"

"My old man is the person who'd be your cousin, you see, so I'm your niece."

"Whaaaaat?"

"Best regards, Junior Auntie."

After defeating the men who had filled the rear without exception, Taiyou carried the wives into the hospital.

Kotone, Suzune, Kazane, and Aoba. They had light injuries. The majority of the hits and grazes were the kind of injuries that once treated, would allow them to return home.

Taiyou was with the girls around a bed. On top of the bed was the sleeping Kohaku.

Her consciousness hadn't returned since the event. Having hit her head, the doctors had diagnosed her with a concussion, telling them that although she probably wouldn't suffer any permanent damage, she'd need some surveillance for the time being.

Gazing at her unconscious form, Taiyou grinded his teeth.

"Kohaku-san...I wonder if she'll be alright."

"...She'll be fine; even the doctors are saying that."

Taiyou gave Aoba a comment to help ease her mind.

"She'll probably wake up by tomorrow morning; afterwards let's go through the hospital discharge procedures, then let's all return home."

He said, and the females were simultaneously surprised.

"When you say return, do you mean that we'll be the only ones returning?"

"No; Kohaku-san will come along as well. Driving would probably be out of the question, but we can make do with a train or something."

""""That's not the issue ! """"

The three sisters let out loud voices. Surprised, he looked at them and noticed that their expressions were angry for once.

"We're talking about Pochi-chan."

"What are you going to do about Pochi-chan?"

"Taiyou-san...you aren't going to abandon her, are you?"

"What do you mean abandon her...You guys might not have heard me correctly, but they're just taking Pochi along with them. From what I've heard, that Anna person is probably a relative of Pochi's, and she's taking her back to make her the head, so they shouldn't be harming her."

That's what Taiyou said, but the girls made dissatisfied faces. In order to persuade them, he continued further.

"Besides, I won't allow you all to be exposed to any more danger. I feel bad for Pochi, but if it means exposing you to more danger then I can't help any further."

Those were his honest feelings.

Kotone, Suzune, Kazane, Kohaku, Aoba.

Though he couldn't attach any ranking to them, the preferential precedence between them and other people was very clear.

If someone right in front of him was seeking help then he would help them; even Taiyou had that much of a sense of justice in him. But if that and the girls' safety were compared and contrasted, Taiyou would decisively choose the girls' safety.

He did not ever want to taste that feeling of despair of not being able to protect them again, he thought as he looked at Kohaku's figure.

They'd surely understand those feelings; accept them.

At least that was what he had in mind when he said that to them.

For some reason, the girls had uniform expressions of anger.

"Why——"

——Smack!

A dry sound rang out, and his eyesight became flickering white.

What in the world——he only realized after several seconds had passed that it was a slap to the face.

Directing his eyes toward the source, he saw Aoba still with an angry expression, right hand outstretched.

"Ao...ba?"

"I misjudged you, Taiyou-kun; that's just, the kind of thing my parents would do."

"Eh...?"

"Prioritizing your spouses, and discarding children because it can't be helped. What you're trying to do right now is that exact thing, Taiyou-kun."

"No, but if you're exposed to danger then I can't just——"

"Isn't it!?"

Aoba strengthened her tone—no, she roughened it. Overpowered, Taiyou wasn't able to say anything back.

That was when the three sisters quietly opened their mouths.

"Taiyou-san, we're not scared of danger."

"What we are scared of is becoming hindrances and preventing you from doing what you want to do, Taiyou-san."

"What we're even more scared of are things that might make you have regrets in the future, Taiyou-san."

"You guys..."

"We want to always, always be together with you, Taiyou-san."

"So...we don't want you to make any regrets that will hold you back."

"Returning home like this...Taiyou-san, won't you have regrets?"

"Regrets..."

Taiyou murmured, as if ruminating the three girls' words.

Chapter 114: Mystery of the Girl / Fine Play

If I were to by any chance leave Pochi be and return home like this...

He imagined what would happen afterwards.

They would probably be able to live out their daily lives no differently than before. It hadn't even been one week since meeting Pochi, and it wasn't like they had become emotionally attached to each other.

Though she had called him "Master", to Taiyou, despite almost being a stranger she was nothing but someone who he found to be allowable to tag along with him.

Even so, he could see himself regretting it if he were to abandon her kidnapped like this.

In a sense, it was something that didn't have to be thought about.

Taiyou had cut her off only because he had prioritized the safety of the girls; the girls that he had to protect. If those girls were wishing for it...

"That's right; we can't leave that child alone."

""""Taiyou-san!""""

"Natsuno-kun."

The sister trio and Aoba's faces broke into smiles. These reactions practically told Taiyou that they were welcoming his answer from the bottom of their hearts. Seeing those girls' reactions, Taiyou couldn't suppress himself from giving a wry smile.

What are those reactions; aren't they a little strange?

That's what he thought, but swallowing those words, he kept their original meaning and reworded it.

"You ladies are great women; so much so that I'm unworthy of you."

He said, and the girls simultaneously became red-faced.

"Well, if you really really try thinking about it, if we left things as they are now, I'm sure that we'd be severely scolded by Kohaku-san later on."

Looking at the unconscious Kohaku, he smiled wryly for a different reason.

"Yeah, Kohaku-san seems like she'd be more angry."

"Not so much angry as scolding, I'd say. Although in the case of this time, getting scolded would actually be more tough."

"That's different from getting angry?"

"A little, yeah."

Thinking of the difference between the two, he gave yet another wry smile. The reason why he had been continuously smiling wryly was essentially because he thought that his options were screwed up.

In that case, he must make the right decision.

Once he decided, Taiyou thought to fly speedily to where Pochi was.

"Alright then; you all can do me a favor and wait here by Kohaku-san's side. I'll take back Pochi, okay?"

"Please wait, Taiyou-san."

"We'll contact Yami-chan right now, okay?"

"I think that it would be best to have her by your side."

"No, I don't need her."

Taiyou instantly shot down the three sisters' suggestions.

"Shirokiyami...I think that she probably won't be of any use. Judging by her state. It's for the best right now to not keep a useless human around."

Taiyou purposefully said in a detached manner. The three sisters whom he had directed that towards were dejected but accepted what he said. The girls had also seen Shirokiyami become unable to battle, so they seemed to understand what Taiyou was trying to say.

Gazing at the three sisters, he was thinking about Shirokiyami in his head. He recalled what had happened prior to when she had become unable to move—prior to when she had become unable to fight.

(At that time...She said "big sis", right? So that person was her elder sister?)

He replicated in his head the words and expressions of the girl who had appeared in front of Shirokiyami.

Certainly their countenances resembled each other, and they were similar enough to where he would believe it if someone told him that they were sisters. But those expressions were so cold that he couldn't believe they were

expressions aimed towards a younger sister.

(For household circumstances...I get the feeling that it's too severe. Though it would be nice if I could follow up.)

Thinking that, he decided to pursue her next.

Right now, he was in a situation where he had to first think of Pochi.

Following that, he turned back in the direction of the door, making preparations for departure. That was when Aoba stopped him with a hoarse voice.

"Natsuno-kun..."

"Hmm? What's wrong?"

"I'm sorry for...earlier."

"Earlier?"

He inclined his head, wondering what she was talking about.

"You know...hitting Natsuno-kun's head and all that."

"...Ohhh."

Taiyou slapped his hands together. Only after she had said that much to him had he remembered that that sort of thing had happened. There were men who would always mind being hit by women, and from Taiyou's standpoint it was unfavorable for him, and yet he hadn't paid it any heed.

Though it was something that he had remembered taking to heart, he had adjusted it in his heart to be something not worth apologizing for, so he hadn't connected them initially.

"Don't worry about it...If anything, I'm the one who should be sorry. Thinking about it carefully, those were the worst options for you after all. I even made a promise with you, and yet I was about to forget the essence of that promise."

"No...it's me who should be saying that. Even though Natsuno-kun was doing all that to protect us; even though what you did had to be right..."

"Deciding whether something is right or not is determined by what you decide to protect. If it was to protect your bodies and lives and whatnot, that was probably the right decision, but if we're speaking in terms of protecting your hearts, those were probably the worst alternatives for you."

"Still——"

"Aoba."

"Huh-"

He embraced Aoba who had tried to retort in order to quiet her down.

"Standing in this way embracing is the best with you, Aoba-san."

"Huhhh?"

Surprised, she widened her eyes to the point where the corners seemed like they would tear.

"People like Kohaku-san and Kazane are small, so placing them on my knees is also fine, but you're the best for embracing in this fashion. When embracing you, Aoba, I can feel you more strongly than before. The realization that I'm hugging Aoba is just really reinforced."

"Natsuno-kun..."

With a hoarse voice, she let out a voice overcome with emotion.

"Taiyou-san...What about me?"

Kotone asked. It was to be expected that of the three sisters, her physique resembling Aoba's, that she would be concerned.

"With you, Kotone, when I close my eyes it feels more vague. Whether I'm hugging Kotone, whether I'm hugging Suzune, whether I'm hugging Kazane...it becomes questionable and I start to not feel sure. ...And now I'm not even sure quite what I'm saying."

"No."

Kotone strongly shook her head.

"That is, a happy thing, at least for us."

She said, and Suzune and Kazane nodded their heads in the same manner.

"Is that so."

A sweet air floated through the room.

It was because he had been told to do so, and it was also because Taiyou himself thought that he should do so.

He was not loving them on the same level...intentionally. In exchange, they were working hard to reach each of their respective best areas in comparison to other girls.

Not inferior in comparison; to show how they were superior in comparison. And without concealing that, he disclosed it. To those who were superior, and also to those who were not.

He began thinking in that manner; that he should do thus.

"Now then, this time for sure——"

After a moment, Taiyou separated from Aoba. It felt like slipping out of a warm futon in the wintertime; a painful reluctance.

While doing so, he tried imaging in his head what Anna would...what sort of actions a person from Juunishima might take, and places where they might go. Establishing several ideas, he decided on an exhaustive search.

"I have arrived!"

Hera appeared, having warped there. Along with that, she had a bright and clear, innocent voice that seemed to blow all of the remaining sweet air away at once.

"Hera! Where have you been up until now?"

"Heheheh, oh I've been somewhere all right."

"What's up with that elated face of yours?"

"Taiyou-chan, do you want to know where I've been up until now? You want to know, right?"

"No I'm fine; right now isn't the time after all."

Taiyou bluntly thrust her question aside. Walking at a brisk pace from there, he headed toward the door.

"You must wait; Taiyou-chan, just wait a minute. You'll really regret it if you don't listen to what your elders and fairies have to say——"

"Although I feel like listening is what would bring me regret."

Taiyou recalled the number of exchanges they had done until now. Hera and Kohaku were of a similar type, and the contents of their exchanges and the foundation of their information were also in close resemblance. What was different was that Kohaku could read the air, while Taiyou thought that Hera couldn't.

Which was why he attempted to ignore Hera in this urgent state of affairs, but...

""Taiyou-san! Please listen to her.""

For some reason, the sister trio took Hera's side. The surprised Taiyou halted, then mutually compared them with each other.

"What do you mean by this?"

"We requested her."

Kotone said.

"To stick with Pochi-chan."

This time it was Suzune.

"If it's Hera's tracking, then you definitely wouldn't get found out."

Kazane said finally, and the three sisters meaningfully grinned. Further surprised, Taiyou became dumbfounded.

"Which, means..."

Like a robot in disrepair, with his movement letting out a "gigigi" sound, he turned toward Hera.

"That's right! I flew here from where Pochi-chan was. No one can see me anyway, and I can return back to Taiyou-chan in a flash."

Chapter 115: Mystery of the Girl / Pride

The wagon that Anna, Pochi, and the driver were riding in stopped at a place with no people in sight.

With her eyelids closed, Anna was crossing her arms, her narrow fingers beating out a nervous rhythm. "Umm..."

Pochi timidly spoke to her. As before, her hands were tied behind her back and she couldn't move decently, but with the gag being released, she was in a condition to converse.

Anna asked her back in a somewhat soft manner.

"What is it?"

"Are you really going to take me with you?"

"Were you expecting me to say 'This was actually a practical joke' or something? Then you'd better toss those wishes. In just a little bit an arranged transportation will arrive. It's only a leap to the island with that."

"We're going to, fly?"

"Yeah, a helicopter's coming."

"Helicopter; with the power of its engine, the rotary wing, known as the main rotor, in the top part of the airframe releases lifting power to fly and is one variety of aircraft."

"You say some odd things. So have you ridden one before?"

"I have not; because I was always inside the mansion with Master."

"I see; then have you also never seen the ocean?"

"Ocean. In areas on the earth other than land, filled with saltwater."

"Yeah, that's it."

"I have not."

"Then have some expectations; we're going to an island, so as you look around you mid-trip you should see the ocean all around."

"Is it really that big?"

"Check with your own eyes."

Pochi was silent when she said that, but her eyes were glowing with expectation.

Anna suddenly thought of her as pitiable. The girl who said that she had always been locked up in a mansion, having not even seen the ocean. If she were to take her to the island, she would of course become even more of a caged bird. From cage to cage; no, the girl who would go to prison.

Thinking of that, she felt sympathy well up.

However, that was but an instant. Anna thrust that away deep within her chest.

"I wanted to see it with Master..."

"Don't be so repetitive; if you want to meet them that much, all you need to do is invite them once we've reached the island."

"So...I can't return to where Master is any longer?"

"Yeah, no longer."

She looked at Pochi with ruthless eyes.

As if proclaiming it...as if thrusting the cruel life that she would be living from now on before her.

"If anything, these are the times when places to return to are running out."

"Running out?"

She tilted her head, puzzled. She plainly didn't seem to understand what she meant.

"That boy has too many people to protect. You saw, right? What it was like earlier. That boy tried to protect those five girls."

"Yeah..."

"You know, humans become more and more helpless as the things that they protect grow more and more. The luggage that you can carry with both of your hands has a limit; even if you rely on the help of others, five people should just about be the limit."

Anna laughed coldly.

"I wouldn't even mind betting on it: the boy won't come. His face had the resolution to not come. If he does chase after us by any chance I'll have him get a Baseball Bat Spank or a Thai Kick."

"Baseball Bat Spank? Thai Kick?"

"They're staples of punishment games."

"Oh, is that so..."

Pochi became despondent. Anna felt sympathy again looking at that face. She wasn't sure why, but whenever she relaxed her guard, she felt favorable toward her. Whether it was because they were blood relatives, or if it was because of something else, Anna just felt like she wanted to side with her. Even if she felt that way, she couldn't actually side with her. Anna secretively regained her focus. She told herself to prioritize following her mission and taking this girl back with her.

"Ah."

Pochi unintentionally stared through the windshield. Before she could examine what exactly Pochi had found, Anna heard a voice at its wit's end.

"Elder Sister!"

It was the voice of the subordinate driver who had been silently sitting down until now.

Anna's expression immediately changed.

From that of a mother cat protecting her child under the winter sky, to that of a female tiger hunting its prey.

§

He probably wouldn't have found them without Hera's guidance. That was just how far of a place where the wagon was stopped.

"You return to where everyone is, just in case something happens."

"I understand!"

A sidelong glance at Hera not teleport, but fly away, Taiyou glared at Anna from the windshield.

The connected gazes scattered sparks.

The next moment, once it was intuitive that words no longer had any meaning...

"Run him over."

"Roger!"

He could hear voices transmitting clearly through the glass, which were of Anna and her subordinate.

Right after, the wagon suddenly took off, charging at Taiyou.

Just as commanded, with enough force to kill Taiyou.

"Hmph!"

Taiyou didn't even dodge; he instead made a sumo-like pose of thrusting his hands out in the direction of the wagon.

Rumbling sounds reverberated, then somehow, the wagon that had started up had come to a full stop.

Pushed by Taiyou, it had stopped.

The tires let out a "kyururu" friction sound, but they couldn't advance forward even by a millimeter.

"What was that?"

"This can't be happening..."

"Uwooooooh!"

Along with a bellow, Taiyou pushed the wagon with all his strength. He pushed this several ton mass wagon along with its tires spinning the opposite way.

Taiyou pushed with all his strength. The wagon was railroad-shoved at once. Thud! Crash!

Along with the sound of metal being smashed and crushed, the wagon was pushed into a wall.

"Step on it more!"

"I am! With all my might!"

"Ridiculous...this thing has hundreds of horsepower; for a human to..."

Anna muttered, shocked.

Alongside the wall, Taiyou lifted his face, making a broad, savage grin.

"Could I have you get out of the car?"

"...And if I said no?"

"I'll continue to flatten you."

"Eeek"

Anna only grimaced in response to Taiyou's threat, but the underling male driver was scared enough to let out a scream. Facing the reality that the wagon at full throttle was instead overcome, a threat no longer sounded like a simple threat.

"Get out!"

Seeing Anna unable to make a decision, Taiyou put further power into it. The car began creaking; letting out a grinding sound that was normally impossible.

"Stop it."

With Anna's order, the tires that were letting out a singed smell finally stopped rotating.

Opening the door, Anna got out of the car together with Pochi.

"Hand her over."

"...Do you really think that things will go your way that easily?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that we still have fighting power."

"What did you just say?"

Surprised, an unusual sound from afar hit his ears.

It was the revolving sound of a rotor; the sound of a helicopter.

While Taiyou was perplexed, the helicopter stopped, and burly men filed out.

Despite their numbers, the inhabitants were already armed and had surrounded Taiyou in an instant.

"Kill him."

"Master!"

At Anna's command, the men assailed Taiyou simultaneously. While Pochi let out her voice, Anna walked her off, going in the direction of the helicopter. Right now, Taiyou was exceeding the average person at everything.

His superior power of pushing back a wagon at full throttle stood out, but his speed and reaction and his being able to take hits were also stronger than a normal person.

In front of that boy, the armed ten men weren't even what their numbers suggested. Before Anna bringing along Pochi had even reached the helicopter, everyone had fallen.

"Give her back."

Wedging himself between Anna and the helicopter and blocking advancement, once again, he one-sidedly thrust his demands at her.

"Do you think I'm going to respond?"

"In that case, I'll just steal her with force."

Taiyou gripped his fists, stepping forward. He readied his fist like a bow—aiming at Anna and releasing it.

The strong arm that had forced back the wagon let out a moan—.

"No—"

In an instant, Pochi let out a loud voice and stepped forward, cutting in between Taiyou and Anna. Panicking at the unexpected event, Taiyou pulled back his fist.

"Pochi? What are you doing?"

"Sorry, Master!"

"Why are you protecting that person?"

"Because because, this person, is related to me."

"Ahh, right, Juunishima..."

Juunishima Anna. Understanding that name, Taiyou looked at her. The woman who hadn't batted even an eye when his fist came for her was making an anguished, chewed up face in response to the fact that she had been covered.

"All right, I won't do anything."

"—! Thank you."

Taking back Pochi who had just said her thanks from Anna, he tore off the rope that had been binding her arms. As if the straw rope were an embroidery thread.

While doing that, he spoke to Anna.

"I've won, yeah? I'm taking Pochi back with me."

"Elder Sister..."

"Yeah, I lost for misjudging you."

"Don't look down on me; I have this much power."

"No, that's not what I mean."

Anna laughed coldly.

"I mean you chasing us here; see, I didn't actually think that you'd come after

us. Is it alright if I ask you why you came after us? Just earlier you were making a face of resignation...no, the face of a man coming to a clean decision."

"There's a saying that goes like this."

Saying that, Taiyou threw out his chest as a feeling of pride welled up from the bottom of his chest.

"In the shadow of a successful man is a good woman."

Chapter 116: Mystery of the Girl / GUILTY

""""Achoo!!""""

In the hospital room, the sound of huge sneezes resounded. As though they had conspired together, the girls sneezed all at once.

"You too, Miyagi-san?"

Kotone made a strange face. It wasn't unusual for the sisters to sneeze at the same time, but now for Aoba to join in, it was a little unusual.

"Yeah, the interior of my nose suddenly started itching. I wonder if someone's gossiping about us?"

"It's Taiyou-san, undoubtedly."

"Natsuno-kun isn't really like that, I think; besides, he's probably doing his best to save Pochi."

"I don't think that's the case."

Kazane grinned. That was the face of someone who didn't think in the slightest that Taiyou was having a rough fight, and the sisters.....made the exact same faces.

"You guys are impressive."

"Taiyou-san is the one who's impressive."

"No, you guys are impressive. To the point where me sneezing with you makes me feel a little apologetic."

"Miyagi-san, have you begun to dislike Taiyou-san?"

"No, that sort of thing is impossible.....but"

"In that case, I think that's fine."

Suzune said, and the three of them gazed at Aoba. The girls were talking about the only definitive guiding principle of justice.

"Yeah..."

Aoba said with nostalgic eyes, smiling calmly.

"I wonder if Mom and the others also felt this way."

"Miyagi-san, your house is like ours, right?"

"Yeah, although it is a little more snug."

"Ours is going to increase more and more. By four more people."

"Wasn't it two more..."

Kotone, who was in a good mood, was corrected by Aoba's hoarse voice.

"So they left..."

After watching from beginning to end the helicopter that Anna was riding on disappear far into the sky, Taiyou finally relaxed his guard. Sighing with a phew, the exhausted Taiyou was filled with a sense of relief that the situation had been managed.

As a result of acting out a scuffle by mowing down some ten people with one fist, he had somehow gained a temporary state of tranquility.

"Master..."

That product, Pochi, called his name, making an apologetic face. Her constant downcast eyes were like that of a child fearing getting scolded by their parents.

"I'm sorry; that I could, do such a thing..."

"Are you alright?"

Taiyou asked that, disregarding her statement.

"Eh?"

"Show me real quick...for someone who was continuously tied up, there aren't any marks. This rope...did they seal it with wax?"

Taiyou took Pochi's hand and took the rope that had tied her up until earlier in his hand, taking a long hard look at it.

He could somehow feel Anna's consideration there.

Looking at the rope and Pochi in turn, he asked her.

"Could it be that you wanted to go together with her?"

"Huh?"

"If you did, then I've done something bad; from my point of view she's an enemy, but for you she's a relative after all. If you by any chance have begun to want to go together with her, then——"

"!!"

Pochi let out a loud voice; having been despondent until just now, Taiyou was surprised at her doing this.

"I want to be together with Master. I'm Pochi, so if I'm not with Master then it's no good."

"Is that so. Sorry for asking you weird things; then let's return to Master's place, I guess."

"Okay!"

Taiyou began to walk forward guiding the vigorously nodding Pochi, but soon remembered something, stopped walking and turned back.

"That's right; I forgot something important."

"Something important?"

"Yeah..."

Saying that, he stared straight at Pochi. He had softly set his hands on her shoulders...

When they returned to the hospital room, it was curiously in high spirits.

"No, the veteran beautiful girl's name ain't Itachi."

"Then does it have any relation?"

"Of course it does; if one were to be deceived at this level, they'd die by the roadside before even reaching the veteran stage."

"More importantly, Kohaku-tan, you should tell us more about your travels. I'm interested in the continuation of your camping car trip."

""More so than that, I'm interested in the car's interior kitchen."

The three sisters, Aoba, and Hera, as well as the recently unconscious Kohaku had formed a circle and were noisily rousing. With six women, the clamor was amplified accordingly, but Taiyou felt healing in that atmosphere.

"I'm back."

"Natsuno-kun!"

Aoba was the first to rush over.

"Was everything alright? Are you hurt anywhere?"

"Sorry for making you worry. As far as I can tell, I'm not hurt anywhere."

"I'm glad..."

"See, I even told you, that Mii-chan worries too much."

"Mii-chan?"

He tilted his head to Kotone's words. He could imagine that it was "Mii" taken from "Miki", but he searched his memories, wondering if he had ever heard that way of referring to her.

"Yeah...Earlier we were discussing how we've come this far together, so rather than us calling each other by our surnames or attaching "san", we should choose a different method."

"Ohhh, and you became Mii-chan."

"Is it weird?"

Aoba asked uneasily, looking up at him.

"No, I think it's nice and cute. It fits you."

"By the way, I'm Kohaku-tan."

Kohaku, wearing patient clothing, puffed up her non-existent chest.

"Yours doesn't fit you. Don't tell me that everyone started calling her that..."

"I call her that—"

"Well you always did."

"Umm...I'd like——"

""Pochi-chan is Pochi-chan, okay?""

"Yeah, you're Pochi."

"You'd best be fine with Pochi."

The girls shut down Pochi as soon as she had begun talking. If someone who was unfamiliar with them were watching, this scenery would probably look like bullying.

"Ah, yes. I'm Pochi, please call me Pochi. That's not what I was talking about though, umm..."

"Hmm, what is it?"

The second master, Kohaku asked in a loving voice. Pochi then made a somewhat more relieved face and once again, began talking.

"Thought that I'd give a greeting."

"A greeting? We all know each other; it ain't necessary, right?"

"No, that's not it."

Saying that, Pochi stared straight at Hera.

"Nice to meet you; my name is Pochi."

"Nice to meet you as well; I'm Hera Kr——wait whaaat?"

Surprised, Hera's eyes darted between Taiyou and Pochi.

"Taiyou-chan Taiyou-chan, Pochi-chan can see me, you know? What happened?"

"If anything, I'm more concerned about what happened with your introduction."

Taiyou said, smiling.

"Well, it's exactly what you think it is."

"Ooo! It's exactly what I think it is?"

"With this, she's now also able to see your form. Get along, folks."

"I look forward to being with you!"

Pochi bowed in a flash.

"Yes indeed! If anything, I look forward to being with you. Although I am a fairy, I'd rather you not pay it any heed."

"Fairy. A spirit in the form of a human. Possesses superhuman power, and as a being that delights in playing pranks, it largely makes appearances in Western tales and legends. Is that right?"

"Likes playing pranks, eh? That definitely fits her description."

"Not pranks; and even if they were, they're of the sexual kind!"

"Quit it with the two-fold plagiarized lines!"

Taiyou hit Hera with his palm.

He suddenly noticed that the three sisters, Kohaku, and Aoba were silent. Looking at them wondering what was wrong, each of the girls had dissatisfied looks on their faces.

"All of you, what's wrong?"

"Natsuno-kun...you did • • it, didn't you?"

"Eh? Yeah, I did it."

"Why'd you do it?"

"Eh? Wait, but you all told me do that, and besides——"

"That sort of thing is a no-no."

"That's right; doing it in secret is a no-no!"

"If I'm——If this girl isn't here then it's no good!"

Stopping what she was about to say, Kazane seized the tottering Hera as she returned like a stuffed animal, thrusting her out in front of Taiyou's eyes.

"Eh, no, there's not really any need for that, yeah? It's true that I did it when she wasn't there, but look, she can see her and everything."

""""""Stare——""""""

"No, umm...

""""""Stare——""""""

"Uhh..."

""""""Stare———""""""

The girls stared at Taiyou. The power of their stares was like a tsunami surging forward at him.

"Umm...Master's Master."

Pochi said with a flushed face, tugging at his sleeve.

"I'll be fine, okay?"

That became the finishing blow. She was just so cute with her blushing face and upward-looking eyes, and Taiyou's senses were lightly blown away. Pulling her small hands toward him, he sealed her lips with the likes of a beast.

The second kiss amidst everyone gazing. With that, Pochi had officially become a member of the Natsuno House.

Chapter 117: The Bond of Parent and Child / Bustling One-Room

Miin miin miin...And thus the world entered summer vacation. Children and students were alive with joy, whereas the family heads saw it as the prime of their working lives. The head of the Natsuno household was also preparing for a big job.

The Natsuno household arrived at the vast parking lot on the outskirts of Seikaen Town. At the parked trailer model wheeled vehicle, the girls, especially Hera and Pochi were spinning around and around with great joy.

"So this is the motor home that Kohaku-san mentioned before."

Despite being the patriarch, Taiyou spoke to Kohaku using only polite language. Kohaku responded to him in a good mood like how a parent would a child.

"That's right. When I was young, I went all over the country with this."
"You wouldn't know that it was such an old car by looking at——Ow!"

Taiyou'd head was struck——by Kohaku. Kohaku asked him after giving the top of his head a good snap with her open hands, with a face that was smiling but also with eyes that were not smiling.

"Did ya say something, Husband?"
"N, no. It's nothing."

Taiyou hurriedly glossed it over, realizing after being hit that he had indirectly brought up her age.

"T, this seems like the sort of thing that comes up in American movies."
"Course; it was imported from abroad after all. The Lylac Company's product, Athanasia'81. It's praised fer being a famous car among famous cars at the highest peak."
"So you drove this all the time?"

Aoba inquired nearby. Unlike Taiyou, she approached Kohaku with a quite

familiar tone.

"Course. Michael might've been willing to drive for his partners, but 'thing is, I was alone back then."

"Your area of expertise is astounding as usual."

When he gave a strained laugh, Kotone of the sister trio appeared from out of the interior. Evenly matched with the still-spinning Pochi and Hera outside, her eyes were also sparkling.

"Taiyou-san, it's amazing in here."

"Amazing?"

"Yes; it's a one-room!"

"One-room?"

Taiyou gained an interest in that word choice that was completely unrelated to cars. Slowly lowering an elated Kohaku to the ground, he stepped into the inside of the car.

"Whoaaa."

He let out a voice of admiration upon entering.

The first thing that met him was a sofa with an attached table in the shape of the Japanese letter "コ". It likely had the capacity for eight people, and if everyone lined their shoulders together then more than ten people could probably sit down. Facing it was a close to 40-inch LCD flat screen television embedded into the wall: an environment that everyone could pleasantly appreciate.

There was a kitchen to the side. A deep sink and an electric burner as well as compact, general facilities like a refrigerator, an electronic range, and so on, had been fully equipped.

The opposite side had a long, narrow passageway connecting further back; midway there were doors for the restroom and shower room; and going to the innermost location revealed two bunk beds furnished on either side.

Though it was of course a motor home, when he saw how space was fully used without waste and how the upholstery was set up to be functional as well as charming, Taiyou was reminded of "A Carpenter's Work" that was often among the renovation programs.

When he imagined this "building" being towed racing along public roads, he suddenly became excited.

"This is...rather than a one-room, isn't it more like a 1DK?"

"Right!?"

"And come take a look at this kitchen, Taiyou-san."

"With these many tools gathered we can cook like we usually do!"

Taiyou who couldn't hide his excitement, and the irregular three sisters who didn't even have the intention of hiding it. The girls, who liked housework, seemed to be the most excited about the kitchen functions that allowed cooking with no inconveniences even whilst traveling.

Taiyou looked around inside. He opened up the doors and storages one by one, checking them. He also examined the level of comfort of the bed and sofa.

"This may actually be more agreeable than the one-room that I lived in until just recently."

"Natsuno-kun's house?"

"Yeah, it was inconvenient in many ways with a six-tatami-one-ken. Storage; that general area."

Taiyou once again surveyed the surroundings, realizing something.

"Come to think of it, Kohaku-san, you mentioned earlier that the max amount of passengers was eight people, but there are no more than four beds. Do the other four sleep on the sofa?"

"Tsk tsk tsk."

Kohaku shook her fingers with a prideful expression.

"That's because...o'this."

Kohaku said, reaching her hand to the panel installed in the wall. She operated several buttons.

When she did that, there was a mechanical "weeen" sound, and a small vibration ran through the car.

"W-What happened?"

"It's amazing—, it's changing form, it's a Transformer!"

"Things are changing one after the other!"

Two excited voices could be heard from outside. Even more excited than earlier, these voices could be heard even through the wall.

"When you say transformation...Whooooa!"

When he was searching for the source of the mechanical sound to figure out what was going on, he realized that he was hearing it from the ceiling. When he looked up, Taiyou saw that the ceiling that had until now been slightly taller than him began to gradually rise.

When the slowly shifting motor home's machine noises came to a stop, there was now a loft— a space like an attic room had opened up.

"So it becomes like this."

"Sweet! It transformed."

Matching the two outside, Taiyou was also hugely excited. His eyes were glittering like that of a boy seeing their first robot anime.

"As I thought, ya really dig these sorts of things, eh?"

"Yeah, this is amazing! To think that it doesn't only move, but transforms too! Hey, how do you get on top?"

Smiling, Kohaku silently adjusted the panel. This time a ladder descended, and Taiyou used that to climb up.

Ahead of where he had climbed up, though simple, there was a space where four people could sleep.

"I see, so now eight people can sleep here!"

"That's right; although at the time when I used it I was travellin' alone, so I didn't use it very much."

"Yeah, this'll definitely be enough!"

Nodding widely, Taiyou had at first wondered what would happen, but now thought that everything would be alright.

The only thing that was a sham about this, was that he himself could not ride.

That day, Taiyou had driven back Juunishima Anna and her subordinates, taken back Pochi, and returned with everyone to the repaired "Taiyou Castle". Kohaku had busily engaged in obtaining a birth certificate for the family

register, then had added her foster daughter——Azumaya Pochi, to the Natsuno household.

During that time period, Juunishima tried various methods to retrieve Pochi. There were times when they had tried to steal her with force, and there were times when they had used old-fashioned, similar-case negotiation methods like sending rolls of banknotes.

Each time he had refused or chased them off, but these methods were all just tiding over the situation on the spot and never led to fundamental resolutions. One day, when he had rejected an amount of money that would rival a salaryman's lifetime annual income, Taiyou had started a conversation with Kohaku when they were alone together.

"I think I should really go to Juunishima. At this rate nothing will be settled."
"I'm also of the same opinion that we should cut off the source from its foundation, but is there any way to do this?"

"I'm thinking of meeting with Youran first. These things are happening because of the conflict revolving around the next head's inheritance, so I want to firstly meet with the closest person to that and listen to what they have to say."

"I see; understood. Then while Husband goes to the island, I'll take those girls along with me and cloud our whereabouts. If we completely erase our whereabouts, doubtless they'll have no choice but to negotiate with Husband."

"Can you really do it?"

"Of course. And besides..."

"Besides?"

"I want to show that girl more of the outside world. From second semester onward I did intend to have 'er enroll in school, and before that I wanted to take 'er on a trip."

"I see."

That was their exchange, and they decided that while Taiyou was going to Juunishima, Kohaku would take Pochi along to see all of Japan. And today was said day of departure.

Taiyou saw off the motor home with the girls in it and Kohaku driving. Smoothly leaving the parking lot and merging onto the public road, one would never imagine that this was all possible for a small-framed, 130 centimeter

person.

"And they're off."

Standing next to Taiyou, Aoba saw them off. She was the only one to remain with Taiyou.

"Was this really okay with you, remaining here? I'm sure that being with them would be a lot more fun."

"No, I'm with Natsuno-kun so I'll be fine."

"That's fine then; so let's head off I guess."

"Wait a bit; the person who's coming with us hasn't arrived yet."

"The person who's coming with us?"

Taiyou quizzically inclined his head. The poston bag lying at his feet was packed with luggage for two people. He had always thought that this would be a two-person trip, so he was surprised to learn that they would be accompanied.

"Yeah, one more person. There's someone who's a little knowledgeable about Juunishima, so I had them come with us."

"Whaaat, are they someone who I know?"

"Yeah, Natsuno-kun also knows them."

Aoba nodded. Curious, Taiyou wondered who in the world that could be.

"Don't tell me——"

"I've kept you all waiting."

"Uwah!"

When he had begun to ask who it was, he heard a voice from behind. When he turned around in surprise, he was further surprised at the identity of the person who had come.

The woman who donned an apron dress with the appearance of a maid. The woman who, while sporting a courteous demeanor, her gaze would never look favorably upon Taiyou.

Aita Mio.

She was one of Aoba's three mothers.

Chapter 118: The Bond of Parent and Child / Those who Fall Further Below

"Mother!"

Aoba clinged to the woman who had appeared. Watching from the sidelines, this embrace without reservation or sense of distance, this manifestation of emotions to convey deep affection made even Taiyou feel warm and fluffy, which was enough to make him smile broadly without realizing it.

"It has been a long time, Aoba-sama."

"Has Mother been well?"

"I am obliged to receive such consideration; I am as you can see. I am instead concerned about Aoba-sama; I heard that you sustained an injury the other day."

"It's fine now; it was just a little blow."

"Is that so."

Mio looked at Aoba's mannerism of putting on a show of being strong with a warm gaze.

"In any case, thank you for coming, Mother."

"If it is the wish of Aoba, I would go wherever you would desire."

Mio said with an earnest face.

"And besides, this feels like returning home. Although it seems that I will be quite resented on account of this trip."

"Eh? Why...wait, who resents you?"

"By the two personages of the mansion. The madams who could not accompany Aoba-sama were vexed enough to bite their handkerchiefs. It was enough to prepare me for what is in store when I come back."

"I could see Mother doing that, but Mama too?"

"She bit hers off. That person is of the physical variety after all."

"And she can finish a full marathon in 3 hours."

Taiyou quietly listened to the exchange between Aoba and Mio. Though he still couldn't adjust to the way Mio spoke to Aoba, if he ignored the manner of speaking, the contents of what they were discussing sounded to him like that of the cozy relationship of mother and daughter. It was as if just recently running away from home and making a fuss about the DNA appraisal was a lie.

Taiyou didn't know the results of the DNA appraisal. He had only prepared it, resulting in it directly reaching Aoba. Whoever her real mother was, was meaningless information to Taiyou. After all, once Aoba had been satisfied, she had continued to view the three mothers as her mothers as per usual, which was why Taiyou also still viewed them as her mothers with no differences. There probably wouldn't be anything wrong with knowing, but there also wasn't any need to know. Something like that with no objective or even methods gave Taiyou absolutely no interest.

After the intimate mother and daughter had briefly enjoyed their reunion, Aoba remembered the left-out Taiyou and turned his way.

"Sorry Natsuno-kun, getting all excited here without you."
"I don't mind."

Taiyou smiled sweetly, turning to Mio with a slight bow.

"In any case, it has been a while, Mio-san."
"Yes, it has been a long time, Natsuno-sama."

Mio said, taking a graceful bow. With refined mannerisms and courteous behavior, as well as from the apron on her figure, she exuded an atmosphere from her entire body that was not of an electronic district, but of a matriarch living in a noble's mansion. She legitimately wore the same outfit and performed those exact duties in the mansion-like Miki Estate. Taiyou did not think that person would seriously show themselves here.

"So Mio-san's coming with us, eh?"
"Yeah, once I told her about what happened, I understood that Mother is from

Juunishima. So I thought to bring her along."

"I was the one who asked to come along. If you will be staying at that island, I was under the impression that it might be a good idea to have a pilot."

"Is that so. Thank you, you'll help us greatly."

This time he deeply bowed his head, offering thanks from the bottom of his heart.

Juunishima, the place of destination. Up until now, Taiyou had heard fragments of information about Juunishima from the people involved: Youran, Sakura, and Kohaku. All of those stories were about things outside the realm of his general knowledge.

Frankly, he felt each time as if he were hearing about a different country.

As a result, he felt just a bit of anxiety about going to Juunishima. It was the mysterious feeling of going to a different country that spoke the same language.

So he believed that if someone from the island were to accompany and guide them, it was of the utmost reassuring.

When he said that, Aoba looked around the area as if remembering something.

"Mother, where is your luggage?"

"Over there; I will now make my way to it."

"No, I'll go; please wait here, Mother."

Aoba said, half-running in the direction that Mio had indicated.

A slightly different-than-usual pattern of conduct. Taiyou came to think that she was quite excited as he looked at her from behind.

"She seems to be having fun."

"Yes, it is most reassuring that she has regained her natural cheerfulness.

Though it is a shame that it was to the thanks of meat trash."

"Huh?"

Doubting his ears, he looked at Mio, their eyes meeting. Her conduct was as usual refined and unbroken, but it was clear that her eyes were the only things not smiling.

Taiyou fearfully inquired of her.

"Umm...Mio-san, what did you say just now?"

"I said that it is a shame."

"Ah no, a little before that."

"Do you mean the passage referring to meat restructured from trash?"

"Hey, that's different from before! Wait, that sounds even worse, doesn't it!?"

He quipped with a cracked voice. Ignoring that, Mio continued to send a cold gaze in his direction.

Eyes that were so cold that they made Taiyou recoil without realizing it.

"Is there something wrong with that?"

"Don't tell me...do you perhaps not admit mine and Aoba's relationship...or something?"

She had the outer appearance of a maid and referred to Aoba with "sama", but the relationship between the two of them was definitely between mother and daughter. There's also the possibility that she might even be the one who was Aoba's true mother.

On the other hand, Taiyou had decided to make Aoba his bride. Putting her in his registry was impossible by the standards of the current Japan, but the two of them promised each other their future, and it there was almost no mistake that from here on they would be in a de facto marriage.

In other words, a couple.

And the stories of parent-in-laws disliking their children-in-laws were in great quantity in the world, so judging from Mio's behavior, he thought that could very well be the case.

Mio answered Taiyou's question with a cold tone.

"The relationship between the two of you is approved by the madams, and most importantly, Aoba is also laughing happily. Therefore, there is no point in me raising any sort of objection at this point in time."

"Oh, okay, so——"

"I simply hate meat trash, is all. These are my personal feelings."

"Whaaat?"

"I don't wish for much. Only perhaps for a certain someone to get roped into a traffic accident and become trash meat in both name and substance, or perhaps if only that person could get attacked by a slasher and have his male organs lopped off from his body. Other than those wishes, I really have nothing else."

"That just became even worse! And what do you mean by “in both name and substance”?”

"It means exactly what it sounds like; were you perhaps unable to comprehend it?"

Her cold eyes grew even colder. Just by having her eyes look at him made him feel like his spine would congeal.

"Could it be that Natsuno-sama's brain tissue is lower than that of crab miso?"

"No, crab miso isn't brain tissue in the first place, alright!?"

"Yes. Which is why I used it in the meaning of—lower than."

"Oof!"

Taiyou's quip was calmly as well as maliciously in plenty returned back to him.

He understood that he was most certainly hated by Mio, and no further words came out of his mouth.

He happened to know that he was hated, and he clearly understood the cause. That was the type of cause that nothing could be done about; therefore Taiyou could do nothing about it.

"Huh? Natsuno-kun and Mother, what are you doing?"

As he was being overpowered by Mio's quiet rage, Aoba who knew nothing had returned, pushing a carrying case. She had asked quizzically, having read the atmosphere.

"Nothing at all."

"Really? The atmosphere feels sort of different from earlier, you know ? "

Aoba unexpectedly said that the air was definitely different. Taiyou was contemplating how to gloss over the situation, when...

"I was conversing with Taiyou about how the fact that Aoba-sama has become more cheerful, and the fact that it is thanks to Taiyou-sama has made me a little envious."

Mio said, aiming her unpleasant eyes at Taiyou.

"That is...correct, is it not?"

"Y, Yeah...that is in fact what you were saying."

"Seriously Mother, what are you saying!"

Aoba's face turned a light red, showing embarrassed resentment. That was so cute, and Taiyou's heart skipped a beat, but Mio became further disgruntled upon seeing that.

"He is the gentleman who is to be Aoba-sama's husband; we will be associating with him for a long time, so I thought that it may be good to not hold back and such and tell him my thoughts in a straightforward manner."

Mio said, looking once again at Taiyou.

"Was there, still something that I was holding back on?"

"No...you didn't hold back in the slightest."

Taiyou could answer nothing but that. Because it was unmistakable that he had not even felt reservation the size of a water flea's mucus.

"You have said it well."

Mio said, accepting the carrying case from Aoba's hands.

"Now then, shall we be going?"

Mio said, and Aoba followed along with that. Taiyou followed along without a choice.

The trip had but begun, and yet Taiyou felt like he would sustain a headache with these grim prospects.

Chapter 119: The Bond of Parent and Child

/ Teasing the Son

"This is impressive..."

Taiyou's eyes opened wide upon entering the guest cabin. He was in the ferry that connected Honshu and Juunishima. As if the consumers were numerous, the periodic operating service alone sent out two rides per hour, and the vessels used were fittingly termed luxury cruise ships. As if Mio had arranged for this in advance, as soon as they arrived at the port they got into a ship and were guided to the guest cabin on the highest floor of the six-floor construct. The room was of a simple making to be sure, but it possessed a wideness of up to twenty tatami mats and was furnished with two single beds as well as a sofa table, and even a television. Until coming here, everything that he had caught sight of were "seats", and Taiyou was surprised by this.

"Is it really here, Mio-san?"

"Yes; it will be a sea voyage that requires time as it is, so I arranged it so that Aoba-sama could at the very least spend time here in an agreeable manner."

"Requires time as it is...how long will it take to reach the island?"

"It will be about five hours for a one-way trip."

"And so we have this room..."

Taiyou thought that was honestly overdoing it. Five hours for a one-way trip was not by any means a short amount of time, but at the same time, a room like this...it wasn't the appropriate length of time for preparing a room of such agreeable lodging. He honestly thought that the reclining seats one floor below were enough. However, it seemed that this was not the case for Mio.

"I will brew tea. Aoba-sama, what would you like?"

"Is there white? I'd like to enjoy Mother's white tea after such a long time."

"Wait just a minute."

"Oh, I'd like——"

"How about coffee, Natsuno-sama?"

Mio spoke up with a sensation of cutting him off. Taiyou unthinkingly became overwhelmed by her timing of intercepting with a hard voice.

"Ah, yeah...coffee's fine too."

"Acknowledged."

He was also fine with coffee, so Taiyou had no choice but to nod. Mio, who had received the two orders, pulled out from her luggage tools and leaves and such, and took out things like powder, proceeding to head to a corner of the room. Using the outlet there, she heated the hot water and, with a professional manner of using her hands and complex procedures she began to brew it.

"Whoa..."

"Mother's tea is super good."

Aoba said in a boastful manner as she came to his side.

"Is that so?"

"Yep! Her cooking is also tasty, but the tea that she brews is even more tasty. When Father and the mothers are all gathered on a typical weekend day, they end up drinking more than ten cups."

"Ten whole cups?"

Taiyou was perplexed.

"Yes. One cup for a good morning greeting, one cup before noon to accelerate appetite, one cup to help with digestion after eating. One cup to assist with falling asleep for afternoon napping—With that feel, they spend their weekends in that fashion drinking tea all the time."

"Wow, that's impressive. If they drink in that manner for all kinds of purposes, does that mean they drink various types of tea? I'm not very informed about tea, but I know about things like black oolong tea for removing oil; that sort of stuff."

"Yeah, there are various types, but I also don't know very much. Mother is super knowledgeable in that area, so maybe you could try asking her afterward?"

"Right; I guess I'll try asking when Kotone and the others are around. I think I

wouldn't mind having them learn various things and even at our place [allot a cup to something] in that fashion."

"Eh..."

Aoba raised her voice. For some reason, her face was flushed with embarrassment.

"Do you do the same thing, with your father and the others?"

"Yeah; is something about that unpleasant?"

"No, it's not, but..."

Aoba said as she intertwined her fingers, fidgeting. It was clear that something was up.

Curious, Taiyou pursued that, wondering what was weird about the conversation.

"I won't do it if it's unpleasant."

"No, it's not that, it's not that...umm, you see."

"Hmm?"

"This is a special rule of the Miki household...along with drinking tea, there's something that you do."

"Something that you do?"

"...s."

"Huh?"

"You...kiss."

"...What?"

Taiyou gazed in wonderment. He took a long hard look at Aoba, wondering what she had suddenly brought up.

"You see, Father and the rest kiss when they drink tea. Umm...when getting seconds they kiss Father, and then they ask Mother for seconds."

"What are they, newly-weds!"

He quipped, and one of the people in question brewing the tea in a remote location looked over their shoulder. It was clear that she could hear Taiyou and Aoba's exchange, and her cold eyes looked a bit different than usual, as if asking "Got a problem with that?".

"Hey, Natsuno-kun. So do you...also do that at your house?"

"That?"

"That, seconds rule. Do you follow that very rule?"

"Oof..."

Taiyou was at a loss for words.

It was embarrassing; extremely embarrassing.

Aoba with a red face and a slightly upward gaze, embarrassed yet making a proposition, as well as this situation. It was like the sweet and sour taste of shoving a whole citrus fruit into one's mouth.

In order to answer that with a straight face, Taiyou still didn't quite...have the right state.

He avoided her gaze for a short while, thereafter evading the topic.

"D, did you do it too?"

"Eh?"

"The seconds kiss...did you do it to your dad too?"

"I, I haven't done it, haven't done it! I definitely wouldn't do that sort of thing!"

"R, right."

"Ah, but...I guess I did it to the cheeks when I was little."

"Cheeks?"

"Yeah, you know. It's the sort of time that you'd hear[When you become an adult you'll be Daddy's bride—]. My mothers always said that it wasn't fair, saying "Me too, me too—"."

While saying that, as if remembering her childhood, Aoba's embarrassment gradually sunk, and a grin made its way onto her face instead.

That was when Mio returned to where they were with a tray holding two teacups.

"I have kept you waiting. Aoba also said these sorts of things when she was young, like[Mama is my lifetime rival]."

"Honestly! Mother, don't bring up things from that past like that."

Though she said it resentfully, Aoba was definitely the embodiment of a good mood. She took the teacup from Mio, putting it to her mouth.

"Yeah, Mother's white is definitely delicious. Try some too, Natsuno-kun."

"....."

"What's wrong, Natsuno-kun?"

Aoba questioned Taiyou, who was spacing out and not taking the coffee.

".....Come to think of it, Master and Aoba-sama bathed together until she was twelve."

"Seriously! Mother, you really didn't have to say that now."

"You said that your favorite Valentine chocolate was the "true sentiment chocolate" up until middle school."

"Well yeah, that was because there weren't any other people to give them to."

"And for Christmas presents, you didn't want anything physical, but rather, the night skyline; there was that year as well."

"That was definitely due to being influenced by manga. Father got carried away and lastly took out the room keys, so he got disciplined by Mama and the others."

"Those were good times."

"True. Huh, Natsuno-kun...You're still stiff, what's really the matter?"

"Cheek...bath..."

"Natsuno-kun?"

"Valentine...Christmas..."

Repeating in delirium, Taiyou muttered several keywords. Aoba initially inclined her head wondering what was wrong, but as if she had realized, her face shone with vitality.

"Natsuno-kun...Could it be"

"Not at all! I'm not jealous at——"

Once he was about to say it, Taiyou suddenly sealed his mouth with both hands.

"He's attempting to quit while he's ahead."

Mio said with an exasperated face. Self-destructing by saying something without even being asked, and the actions of nonverbally heightening the attention to it by sealing one's mouth.

This was a blunder very unlike him, and it was quite right that Mio looked exasperated.

Looking at Taiyou in that state, Aoba got in a good mood, though embarrassed.

It seemed she was quite happy that he was jealous.

"Cough"

As if trying to gloss it over, Taiyou coughed and accepted the teacup from the tray that Mio was holding.

Upon putting the coffee to his mouth, he was taken aback in another way.

"This...is delicious."

"I am obliged."

"This is amazing; to think that you not only brew tea but you also brew coffee this tastily. This is honestly delicious enough to where it makes me question what I've been drinking all this time."

"What brand is that, Mother?"

Aoba asked, and Taiyou also directed a face full of curiosity toward Mio. There was of course the way it was brewed, but he was also curious about the brand of coffee that he had just tasted; the true form of the beans used.

"It is Kopi • Luwak."

"Ohhh, you brought something amazing with you."

From Aoba's admiration and that favorable nuance, he could tell that this was unmistakably a good thing.

He lifted the coffee to his mouth once more. It somehow tasted even better than earlier.

That was when Mio quietly opened her mouth.

"Made from cat feces."

"Pu———"

As soon as he heard Mio say that, he spewed it out magnificently.

Chapter 120: The Bond of Parent and Child

/ A Man's Profile

"Ah, such a waste..."

"Huh?"

After spewing it out, Taiyou had protested saying in a loud voice "What did you make me drink!?", but he swallowed those words with Aoba's murmuring. No joke or irony, she seriously seemed to think it was "a waste". Bewildered, Taiyou wondered what she meant.

"When you say that it's a waste, you mean this?"

"Yeah, that's a really expensive coffee. Right, Mother?"

"It is as you say. It depends on the substance, but perhaps you could view it as approximately ten thousand yen for one cup."

"Whaaaaat"

Taiyou became perplexed in yet another sense of the word. He had not so much as thought that this thing was ten thousand yen for a cup.

"Are you sure?"

"I no longer tell lies to Aoba-sama."

Repressing the urge to ask "But it's okay to just lie to me?", Taiyou fixedly stared at the the cup's contents. Upon hearing that it was ten thousand yen for one cup, oddly enough, it now seemed to be glowing a gold color to his eyes.

"But, what you said earlier..."

"Uhh...what was it again, Mother?"

"From the cat known as the civet."

Asked by a gazing Aoba, Mio began speaking with a calm voice.

"This brand, Kopi Luwak, is composed of processed indigested coffee beans taken from the civet's excrements. I say indigested, but what I mean is that a fermentation that is naturally impossible to occur via enzymes actually occurs in the civet's body, becoming this refreshing flavor of coffee."

"Certainly...it's refreshing and really good, but..."

Taiyou gave off a sour face.

The flavor of the coffee itself was excellent. The tasty coffee had a refreshing and invigorating flavor, and it was enough to make one think "Oh, there might very well be enough value in this for its price".

There was no issue with the taste, but hearing about the manufacturing process just made him lose his nerve.

"Was it unagreeable with your mouth?"

Mio asked as he was staring down the inside of the cup.

"N, no, that's not it, uhh..."

"If it was not agreeable, I could swap it with a different brand...?"

"Uhh, yeah...that would be great if you would."

"Then, something like black ivory."

"You brought that too?"

Aoba became even more surprised.

"You know what that is, Aoba?"

"Yeah, it's a coffee that's even more expensive than this one. I haven't even had the privilege of drinking it more than once or so."

"Really?"

"By the way, this is as its name suggests. It is coffee made from beans assembled from an elephant's excrements!"

"Feces again!? Isn't there something else?"

"If you would be fine with something like monkey coffee or tanuki coffee."

"No, I think I'm done with that genre!"

Taiyou quipped in a loud voice.

Leaving the two women in the guest cabin, Taiyou went out on deck alone. The ship was already in the middle of the ocean, where there was nothing but sea for three hundred sixty degrees all around.

Beginning with the coffee affair, Taiyou confirmed that Mio was harassing him. And to make things worse, these were all mental attacks.

Just like the coffee made from cat feces; just like how though it was unmistakably a high-grade product, she had purposefully chosen those to treat

him in a mental way, Mio was unleashing the next attack after the next attack in a way that made it impossible for Taiyou to complain.

There were four hours remaining until arrival at the island, and he couldn't keep his cool like this, so that was why Taiyou had escaped out on deck.

"Phew...Well I mean, if I were to think of it as a type of jealousy then I'd have no choice but to put up with it, but still..."

No matter what was done to him, Taiyou didn't hold the slightest bit of ill will toward Mio.

Even an onlooker would be able to tell that Mio was doting on Aoba; meanwhile Taiyou was the man who had stolen Aoba away. If one were to think of the harassment toward the man, the son-in-law who had taken away her beloved daughter, this type of intricate pestering was actually possibly charming.

"Now then..."

Muttering, Taiyou sent his senses to the fairy who was undoubtedly far away. Promptly, Hera appeared in front of his eyes.

"Did you call me, Taiyou-chan—?"

"Yeah, is everything okay over there?"

"Yes indeed, it's okay. We're actually having a banquet in the car right now."

"It's still daytime, you realize."

And though he said that, when he imagined the scene of the girls gathered jabbering about in the motor home that he had seen earlier, he gave a broad smile without thinking.

"But but it's really lively—. Everyone's roused up with common topics."

"What the heck do you mean by common topics?"

"Topics about what part of Taiyou that we came to like."

"Wha, you guys—"

"Incidentally, when I said that I'm here as myself only for Taiyou's sake, Pochi's face looked terribly envious at me."

"How does that make anyone envious!?"

"Because it's fate."

"Seriously, why do you feel the need to say good lines so wastefully?"

"Incidentally, Kohaku-tan——"

"Yeah, it's fine. You don't have to say it."

"Whaaaaat? It's a wonderful reason; if Taiyou-chan hears it then he'll grow to love Kohaku-tan even more, you know?"

Hera protested. She seemed to want to let out something quite good. But hearing that, Taiyou began to feel more and more like he mustn't hear it.

"I don't want to hear that from your mouth; I want to hear it directly from theirs."

".....Ohhh."

Hera slapped her hands together.

"That is very true! You do want to hear it directly from the person's mouth, huh?"

"Yeah."

"I understand; then zip goes my mouth. Until the actual person says it I won't say it even at my peril——"

"It's over; you just normally don't chatter about it any further."

"Right you are."

"So, the reason I called you out here was because I was thinking to ask you about the next level. What must I do to rise to Level 13?"

"You're going to do that here?"

"Yeah, 'cause Aoba's coming with me. As a precaution, I'd like to attach further power to myself."

"I understand; then take out your smartphone, Taiyou-chan."

Just as he was told, Taiyou took out his smartphone and listened to Hera's explanation.

Aoba came out from the guest cabin, and upon entering the deck she quickly found Taiyou, but she also found Hera's figure at his side simultaneously.

Upon realizing that Hera was there, she turned back once toward the guest cabin, but there was no trace of Mio tagging along, so Aoba relievedly walked up to the two of them.

"Natsuno-kun, Hera-chan."

"Ooo, it has been a while."

"It hasn't even been half a day since we parted..."

Aoba smiled wryly, looking at Taiyou. As if he hadn't even noticed her presence, he was messing with his smartphone, lifted up his head, and didn't even respond.

"What is Natsuno-kun doing?"

"He's raising his level; next up is 13."

"He's doing it here?"

"Of course he is; after all——"

About to say something, Hera instead sealed her mouth with her own hand.

"What's the matter?"

"It's nothing."

"What do you mean by nothing; you just said 'after all'."

"You should hear that from the person themselves; if I say it then it's no good."

"? I don't really understand, but okay then."

Though puzzled, Aoba accepted the explanation satisfactorily. She then looked once again at Taiyou.

His gaze fallen on the smartphone while operating it in repetition with his fingers, his face in profile was the very definition of earnest. His gaze on the smartphone, he was staring at it straightforwardly almost as if piercing through it, working wholeheartedly on raising his level.

Looking at his face, Aoba's heart skipped a beat.

Her heart felt a thrill as she looked at the face of the man who was pushing forward in a straight line facing in front of him.

Her heart beat fast, throbbing.

Like an insect lured into a light trap, she unsteadily crept her face closer, kissing Taiyou's cheek with a smooch.

"Ooo"

Hera exclaimed in admiration as Aoba's lips began to separate from him. He had been kissed, and yet there was no change from within Taiyou. He was continuing his levelling up with a level of concentration that prevented him from even realizing that he had been kissed.

"He's really serious..."

"Yeah, that he is."

"I'm sort of jealous."

Aoba made a face that was almost laughing and almost embarrassed.

Chapter 121: The Bond of Parent and Child

/ Mother-Daughter Bowl

"Come to think of it, why did Aoba-chan come along?"

"Eh?"

"Everyone at the other place said this, you know? They said that they wanted to travel with Aoba-chan."

"I see, so you were with everyone earlier."

"That's right."

Aoba gave a faraway look as if thinking of something faraway.

"Well there's...no particular reason."

"Really?"

Hera made a shocked face.

"Yeah..."

"But but, Kohaku-tan was grinning, you know?"

"Kohaku-san was? Hoh, did she say something else?"

She had looked melancholic just earlier, but now Aoba was just a bit disordered. The young girl with rich life experience; the Natsuno household's leader. Her perception was recognized by everyone, therefore... Aoba had no choice but to be interested in what she had said.

"Well let's see..."

While crossing her arms, the buoyant Hera put a finger against her cheek, making a pensive expression.

"She said——that "Youth's a good thing". Is Aoba-chan enjoying her youth?"

"Oof..."

Aoba groaned; Kohaku's words were quite roundabout, but the words that she had directed toward the person in question were enough to be carved straight into her chest.

"H, Hera-chan."

"What is it?"

"Don't say that to Natsuno-kun."

"Why not?"

"I'm begging you!"

Aoba clasped her hands together and lowered her head. To the side, Taiyou was still concentrating on levelling up without taking notice of their conversation.

Hera also stared at him.

"But I can't hide anything from Taiyou-chan. If I'm asked then I have no choice but to answer."

"I understand that, but I don't want Hera-chan to initiate it."

".....Understood, in that case I can do that."

Hera thought a bit, then smiled in her usual carefree manner.

"Really? Thanks!"

"Mmph!"

Sensing bloodlust, Taiyou immediately twisted his body. Right afterward, Hera's body shot past the area where his crotch had been like a bullet.

"The hell are you doing!"

As expected, Taiyou protested; it was perfectly reasonable to protest when someone attempted to target the crotch area whilst someone is concentrating.

"Because if I don't do this then Taiyou-chan won't come back—"

"I will! If you just talk to me like a normal person I'll return!"

"Huh—, but you do realize that you didn't return?"

"I'll return."

Hera drooped with a sour face. Taiyou raised a further objection to her pretext.

"And you aim for the crotch area every single time; at least aim for the solar plexus or something."

"If you'd come to your sense that way, I would..."

"Do it."

".....I did."

She seemed to mutter something at the end, but it didn't reach Taiyou's ears. He assumed she was making some sort of complaint and let it go through one ear and out the other.

"In any case, what is it?"

"Ah yes, we should be reaching the destination very soon."

"Really?"

He lifted his head and looked in the direction of the ocean; upon doing so, just like Hera had said, he saw land and a facility that seemed to be a port.

"The recent announcement said that there are thirty minutes remaining."

"Thirty minutes huh, and how's that levelling up?"

"Incomplete."

"Is that right."

Hearing that it would take time, Taiyou completely gave up and put the smartphone away in his pocket. Initially, levels wouldn't raise quickly, but levelling up was exactly the process of getting those points, so the boy who had experienced many a game levelling to max wasn't particularly surprised.

"Now then, guess I'll return to where Aoba and the rest are."

Saying to no one in particular, he motioned to return to the guest cabin.

"Yo."

That was when one man spoke to him. He sported a casual outfit consisting of a jacket with rolled up sleeves and plain jeans. He seemed to be in his mid-twenties and had deeply chiseled features on his face, so that outfit was made to fit him very well.

"Hah..."

Taiyou gave a vague response to this man who he did not know.

"My name is Saekusa Tsukumo, nice to meetcha."

"Oh, and I'm Natsuno Taiyou."

He introduced himself while shaking the hand that was held out in a friendly manner. He honestly couldn't read the other person's intentions, but since he

was approached, Taiyou didn't think it would be right to ignore him. Mid-handshake, he shot a glance at Hera. He was urging her to keep the promise of not talking to him in front of other people.

"Roger—"

Hera saluted him, and Taiyou returned his attention to Tsukumo. Their hands were still connected.

"Taiyou-kun, is it? You have some really nice hands, dude."

His shoulders shivered, and he had pulled his hand back without realizing it. "Don't tell me", he thought to himself as bad premonitions circled through the back of his head.

"Don't be so cautious, don't be; I'm not homo, and I'll also add that I'm not bi either. I'm the kind of guy who's established himself to be into the mother-daughter bowl right now, so having those sorts of feelings for you is impossible; relax."

"Uh, huh..."

"By the way, you familiar with the mother-daughter bowl? Written as mother and daughter, it's the mother-daughter bowl. It means to sexually eat the mother and daughter at the same time, but this is really something amazing. Mutual love is all well and good, but having them tell you after half-forcing consensus [Didn't you say that you wouldn't lay your hands on my daughter?] is rather quaint, see."

"Uhh, what exactly are you trying to say?"

"So I've set myself to be like that as of late, and it's not just that chicken and egg that you see all the time, but also the parent-child bowl made from salmon and salmon eggs that I'm hooked on. Oh right, did you know? Where this ship is headed, on the outskirts of the port town there's a soba shop with a parent-child bowl soba on the menu; that's also pretty good. And the shop is run by mother and daughter, so it's not just a shop that you can enjoy with the tongue but it's also a shop that you can enjoy with the eyes and heart; it's amazing, yo."

"I, is that so?"

Clamorous alarm bells were ringing inside Taiyou's head, bringing it to his attention that this was bad, that this man in front of him was no good.

A genuine pervert.

He had for a while been encountering strange people quite frequently, but the majority of them were rational, reasonable humans who he could converse with.

But this man before him was different: the type of human that reason would not work on.

"Umm, I've got to——"

"Oh, wait wait."

When he tried to escape, Tsukumo went round and cut in.

"The conversation isn't over yet man; from here on I'll be discussing the essence of the spectacular mother-daughter bowl."

"Sorry, but I——"

He swallowed the words "I have company". Remembering that Mio and Aoba were mother and daughter, he had decided it was best not to mention it.

"We'll be arriving soon, so I have preparations and such."

"Do you hate the mother-daughter bowl or something? Males too?"

"No, like I was saying"

"I get it; if you're saying that much then I'm willing to make a compromise. But at the very least, do me a favor and tell me one thing."

"And what's that?"

As long as he was standing in the way, Taiyou thought to quickly hear what he had to say then quickly make an escape.

But, he soon realized that that was a mistake.

"Did ya know that most of the chicken meat used for eating purposes is of the male variety?"

".....What?"

"Just like humans, chickens are divided into male and female; so far so good, but the females are set aside to lay eggs, and they only become food once they can lay no more eggs, but by that time they've packed on quite a few years and the quality of their meat hardens, so they're not fresh meat but are made into processed meat. We good so far?"

"Uh, huh...sure."

"So if that's the case, then of course the fresh meat is of the male persuasion all the time. Do you understand what this means? You get it already, right?"

"No I don't."

Taiyou was at a complete loss as to what he was trying to say.

"What an idiot! I gave hints along the way and you still don't understand? It can't be helped; I'll teach ya from A to Z. So this is how it is: As long as the majority of fresh meat is male, the typical parent-child bowl isn't mother and daughter, but is actually father and daughter!"

Tsukumo insisted, thrusting a fist up into the air.

".....Yes, I understand."

Not wanting to be involved any longer than this, Taiyou irresponsibly parried his responses and then tried to escape from that spot. But Tsukumo once again went around and blocked him.

"Well wait, we're not finished talking."

"No, I really have something to take care of."

"I gotcha; it was my bad for being roundabout. I shouldn't discuss the parent-child bowl of food, but properly discuss the mother-daughter bowl, yeah? I thought that it would be good as a starting point, but it seems that I really should have spoken to you about it directly."

"No, I seriously——"

Taiyou couldn't break away from Tsukumo, who followed him around. In his head he recalled a game scene where he selected the "Run" command only to be cut off again and again.

He secretly sighed, ready to give up.

He was a dangerous person, but so far there was no real damage done. At this rate he would have to noncommittally listen and then once the ship arrived he would meet up with Aoba and the rest, making haste to force their way out for an escape.

They were on the ship, which was on the ocean, and right now nothing could be done, so he thought that was his best option.

He thought, and then the next moment...

"Taiyou-chan!"

Breaking the promise, Hera approached him.

Chapter 122: The Bond of Parent and Child / Astonishing Power

Taiyou glared at Hera. Around the time they had barely met, they had exchanged a promise for her not to call out to him in front of other people. It was because if other humans were to see him talking to an unseen Hera, they would think he was crazy.

Hera had broken that.

He momentarily felt unpleasant, but soon reconsidered. Because that was how cornered her expression was.

Shooting a glance at Tsukumo in front of him, he took out his smartphone and put it next to his ears.

"Umm hello, what's up?"

Even if the person in front of him was a weirdo, he was still in the presence of an outsider so Taiyou put on an act.

"Aoba-chan's in trouble!"

That composure was quickly blown away.

Anyone who was able to see Hera's form——that is, the girls who had kissed with Taiyou, Hera was able to sense their safety or lack of safety regardless of physical distance. Taiyou who had been saved by that ability on numerous occasions held no doubts toward its effectiveness.

"Where is she!"

"Over here!"

Taiyou dashed forward to where Hera was initiating.

"Uh-oh, you realize we're still in the middle of our conversation."

Tsukumo went around and blocked him, making this the third time. Up until now he hadn't been pressed the other two times, so he had mentally endured it, and it wasn't anything harmful, so he hadn't gotten serious or

escaped.

But right now was different, and if Aoba's safety was in question then he didn't have the time to be so easygoing.

"Can you move?"

"No no, from here on out we're gonna get into the nitty-gritty of the mother-daughter bowl. First off—"

"Move."

Tsukumo, still trying to talk about his interests without reading the air caused Taiyou's boiling point to reach its threshold, turning his personality to below freezing.

Letting out the kind of low cold voice that was enough to make one's hair stand on end, he flung out a backfist to brush him off.

He had let out thirty percent of his power, so from experience that was sufficient to blast anyone away.

"Whoa there."

As if playing dumb, Tsukumo flung Taiyou's hand away, or rather, warded it off. It felt like his hand was lightly touched, then all of a sudden it veered off in a different direction.

In a moment, feelings of antipathy shifted to a guarded posture.

His hips dropping deeply, he assumed a stance of pitching forward. He then kicked the ground and dashed fiercely.

He tried to pass through Tsukumo's side in one go.

Seeing Taiyou's movement, Tsukumo once again revolved around him. Stepping in a bizarre manner, he abruptly spun around him.

"Having had this happen four times, I could have guessed as much!"

Quietly howling, he charged through with force. If he would stand in his way then he would blast him away!

That was what he thought, but the next instant his field of vision spun around. He should have charged straight forward, and yet all of a sudden he had been spun around ninety degrees.

About to dive through the deck railway, Taiyou frantically stepped on the brakes. Just in time he stopped himself from falling into the ocean.

Turning around, he looked at Tsukumo.
He no longer saw him as a mere weirdo.

"You...Who are you?"
"I'm just a guy with petty interests named Saekusa Tsukumo."
"I'm not asking about that."
"Age 26, Virgo with blood type O."
"I'm not talking about that either."
"From about a year ago I set myself up as a man who loves mother-daughter bowls and up till yesterday I've eaten 49 groups of mothers and daughters."
"And I really could care less about that."

He cut him down with a cold voice.

"Then what are you trying to ask? If I hear really unpolished questions then I might not be able to answer properly, man?"
"Your objective."
"I'd say that it's to spread the love of the amazing mother-daughter bowl in the meantime?"
"Tell me your real objective!"

Taiyou had ultimately grown tired of Tsukumo's talk about "eating" people.

"To live out my life in an interesting yet odd fashion, maybe?"
"You bastard!"

Still being made fun of, Taiyou leaped forward, unleashing his fist with all his might. He possessed enough power currently to blast through steel plating, but not caring, he thrust it at a human in the flesh.
But that nevertheless did not hit.

"Uwah! Hyah! Oof!"

Like a clown, Tsukumo let out strange voices and continued to dodge Taiyou's punches with weird movements. The punch that hadn't so much as grazed him ripped through the sky, and then Taiyou's breathing began to grow rapid.

"Scary scary, if that had hit then it wouldn't have just taken out a bone or two; it might very well have gouged through the flesh, yo. You have even greater power than the rumors might suggest, man."

"Shut up, make way already."

"By the way, do ya like the mother-daughter bowl?"

"——Ngh!"

A question that he had been asked numerous times was thrown at him in its entirety this time.

Taiyou went into a frenzy, leaping even further up.

"Tai • you • chan!"

He could hear the fairy's voice. Like after an encouraging shout at a golf field, a small body aimed at Taiyou flying in.

Of course, that impacted his groin area.

"Guh——"

A sudden quick attack; an unexpected attack from an ally. Fainting in agony, Taiyou held his hands to his groin and cowered.

"Eh?"

Tsukumo, unable to see Hera, made a questioning expression, and not paying that any heed, Taiyou glared at Hera whilst dribbling cold sweat. But, unlike usual, Hera also returned Taiyou's glare in full.

"What are you doing Taiyou-chan! You must remain calm!"

"Ca...Im..."

"That's right, you need to calm down! It's clear that your opponent is acting out a weird performance and making fun of you; falling prey to his provocation is the kind of thing that bird-brains would do!"

"——"

He caught his breath while crawling on the ground like a caterpillar.

"You must be more composed! もっと冷静になるのです！ You must become cool like the spelling of KOOL!"

".....Haha."

A laugh slipped out. Though she was fuming and lecturing him, Hera was still the girl who spoke in the same fashion.

Compared to that, he felt like an idiot for falling prey to that cheap provocation.

Taiyou sucked in air, standing up while enduring the pain in his crotch.

"How's Aoba look?"

"She's still in danger, but only in danger."

"So I'm not, too late."

With Tsukumo looking at him, he conversed as usual with Hera. His opponent gave him a dubious face, but he didn't pay it any heed.

Objective and method.

Regaining his composure, Taiyou did not mistake those for something else; what he should prioritize the most was his objective...to dash to Aoba.

"Do you know the place?"

"She should be where she was previously."

"Got it."

"What's up what's up, suddenly talking to yourself; are you maybe one of those people who——"

Tsukumo tried to persistently say something, but it no longer entered Taiyou's ears.

He silently walked over to Tsukumo.

Step step, step step.

Like taking a stroll, slowly, he stepped each time in stride.

"Oh, so you really were interested in what I have to say? Alright, sit down there; this is usually where you should adopt a seiza posture but I don't mind letting you specially sit at ease, my dude."

Completely ignoring his practical jokes, he walked toward Tsukumo. Even upon entering the range where he could move his arms to hit him, he did not do so and just kept walking onward.

"Whoa——"

The color of Tsukumo's face slightly changed. He leaped back as if taking his distance from the approaching Taiyou.

Taiyou still kept closing in their distance.

Slowly, and without using any of this momentum.

"Whoa whoa, you're not taking this lightly enough, mate."

"....."

He silently continued to close in on him.

If he were to dodge then that was fine, and even if he didn't dodge, Taiyou had confidence that he could push one or two people out of the way just by walking normally.

So he walked; continued to walk.

"Your judgement on the spur of the moment is amazing, pal. But that's still pretty shallow, don't you think?"

"....."

"It can't be helped, although I didn't really want to use my pinning techniques on anyone other than beautiful mother and daughters."

Tsukumo said, this time not backing down and instead taking Taiyou's arm. All of a sudden, heaven and earth flipped, and not understanding what had been done to him, he was thrown in an instant, his joints arm-barred. His joints squeezed by Tsukumo let out screams. He had completely been settled in a position where he couldn't move.

"Got you."

"What?"

Taiyou muttered alongside a surprised Tsukumo.

"Uwoooooh"

The next moment, Taiyou let out a fierce cry, pumping power into his arms.

"It's useless; you've been completely pinned——"

Tsukumo lost his words mid-sentence. Taiyou had forcibly lifted up his opponent along with his pin.

Taiyou rised standing upright as if nothing had happened. Tsukumo, still clinging to his joints, looked from the sidelines like a monkey hanging from a tree. He was dumfounded, and Taiyou did not overlook that.

"Fly away!"

He brandished Tsukumo and threw him. The adult man's body flew off like a cannon ball.

He flew off not like a parabola, but drawing a straight line. In the twinkle of an eye, his body left the ferry and soared faraway yonder.

"As expected, Taiyou-chan is amazing."

"Let's go."

He didn't a single glance in Tsukumo's direction, nor did he respond to Hera's flattery. Taiyou simply muttered and dashed into the cabin expressionless.

Chapter 123: The Bond of Parent and Child

/ Back and Front

"Welcome back, Aoba-sama."

When she returned to the cabin, Mio gracefully bowed, welcoming her in. From when she was in her parents' house...Mio, whose attitude hadn't changed one bit since Aoba was a child, had a face that was clearly comparatively gentler than earlier. She could tell.

Aoba wasn't stupid; if anything, she had observation power that was above normal. For some reason, Mio viewed Taiyou as an enemy, and Aoba was able to tell from the moment that very day. Just by Taiyou being there caused the air to stand on edge, making the atmosphere uncomfortable.

She thought of Taiyou who was even now raising his level while being protected by Hera on deck, as well as of what was to come.

Aoba wondered if there was some way to restore Taiyou and Mio's relationship.

"I'm back. Was Okaa-sama always in the room?"

"Yes; there was some time open, so I took the opportunity to knit."

Mio, having said that, had woolen yarn and two needles at her feet, the woolen yarn becoming a calm hue of a knitted fabric.

"You do knit everyone's share every year after all. Are you going to knit the full set this year as well?"

"No, the madams will only get sweaters; Master feels pain again this year, and I must re-knit all of them."

"It's Okaa-sama's handmade clothing, so the pain came sooner for Father since he was always wearing them."

"I am obliged."

Mio faintly...flushed her face in a way that probably only Aoba would have noticed.

One father and three mothers.

This wasn't your average family organization, but to Aoba, these parents were

even now madly in love; almost like newlyweds.

Until a bit earlier, she had thought her lifestyle to be nothing noteworthy; just everyday life/completely natural, but as of now her viewpoint had completely changed. Aoba thought she should learn from these parents who were still passionately in love with each other even being middle-aged.

"Okaa-sama, will you teach me how to knit next time?"

"What has come over you?"

Mio unthinkingly stopped moving her hands, looking at Aoba with a slightly surprised smile.

"I also want to do the same things as Okaa-sama. I want the things I knit to be worn by everyone; by Natsuno-kun."

"Certainly."

Mio gave an immediate answer, but Aoba didn't miss the corner of her mouth stiffen up.

".....Okaa-sama."

"Yes."

"Okaa-sama, you——"

The moment she tried to ask her about Taiyou, the door opened with a clank. Mio's face stiffened, so thinking that Taiyou had returned, Aoba held her tongue.

However, that wasn't the case.

"Who might this be? This room has been privately reserved, so I'd rather that you departed."

"Huh?"

Looking toward the door, two woman stood there. A girl wearing sailor clothing on one side, and a middle-aged woman wearing thick makeup on the other side • • were standing there.

The girl looked stiff and had an expression on her face that didn't seem welcoming, while the woman had the kind of pale smile that seemed to look down on people.

This was not at all favorable, and just like how Aoba felt that way, Mio also immediately stood up, standing in front of her daughter to cover her.

"Because zis is za right room. You are ze voman named Miyagiaoba?"

The middle-aged woman opened her mouth, speaking the correct words but with a rhythm and intonation in the way that a foreigner would.

"You have the wrong person."

Mio flatly denied them. Even Aoba got the feeling that it was best to deny them.

"Zen, 'ow about zis voman?"

She said, this time pulling out a snapshot from her chest. It was an outdated performance.

Photographed there was Aoba in a school uniform with her eyes looking elsewhere, presumably taken in secret on her way to school.

"You have the wrong person. I believe that it is a different person that simply has a resemblance."

Mio still denied it. The room's atmosphere immediately froze.

"Vhat do you sink, Chan Suu?"

The woman tried to arouse the girl's interest. Not answering directly, the girl only nodded.

"If ze face is ze same zen zat is fine. Hand over ze woman."

"I will be refusing."

"Heheheh."

The woman laughed coldly, walking toward them casually. Her body stiffening, Aoba clung to Mio.

Said Mio glared at her opponent.

Having approached a touchable distance, the woman reached out her hand—when it happened.

"Eh?"

The body that was slightly more plump compared to Mio half-revolved, struck to the ground.

The one who did that was Mio, having grabbed hold of her opponent's outstretched hand, twisting it and throwing her.

"Vat vas zat"

"....."

The girl softly murmured something.

"The power of Aiki."

The woman got up muttering. Despite the fact that she had just been thrown, her expression had not changed. The smile that looked down on people making fools out of them was still attached.

Aoba felt a very bad premonition when she saw that face.

"Okaa-sama, I'm going to call Natsuno-kun."

"Aoba-sama."

The moment she took out her smartphone, she was stopped by Mio calling her.

"W-What's wrong?"

"....."

"Okaa-sama?"

"I have been tasked by Master with handling the protection of Aoba-sama, even if I must do it here alone."

"Okaa-sama..."

"Oh, so you 'ave confidence."

"As I intend to protect Aoba-sama, I am prepared for anything in every way."

"Anything?"

Staring in puzzlement, the woman thereafter looked up and laughed loudly. Looking closely, the girl behind her was also astounded, snickering mixed with sighing.

"What is so funny?"

"I just sought zat you really are a voman."

"Are you not also women?"

"Yes, ve are vomen. So"

As she said that, the woman and girl took out guns at the same time. The girl from a holder under her skirt, and the woman once again from her chest.

"Ve can do anysing."

"Mio-san!"

Hastening into the room, the first thing that jumped into his eyes was the form of a fallen Mio in a pool of blood. Taiyou rushed to her side.

"Natsu, no...sama"

"Are you alright?"

"Somewhat..."

She said, but it was clear that it was on a different level than “somewhat”. Taiyou immediately took the phone next to the bed, contacting the ship’s medical room via inner lining.

"Aoba-sama was..."

"Aoba? Yeah, where’s Aoba?"

"She was taken away...right about now, they should still..."

".....Was Aoba shot too?"

"No, they only...knocked her...unconscious."

Having said that, Mio fell unconscious.

"Mio-san!"

He called her name, gripping her shoulders. She seemed to only have lost consciousness.

"Taiyou-chan! What will you do?"

".....How’s Aoba look?"

"She seems to still be fine right now."

"I see."

"Are you not going to search for her?"

Hera was shocked to see Taiyou not move.

"Right."

"But Aoba-chan has been"

"If she was knocked unconscious and taken away then we can’t do anything about it for now. If they intended to they could just shoot this place like they did to Mio-san. Besides, your sense indicates that she’s still fine. Right?"

"That’s true, but....."

"If I abandon Mio-san here and if something by any chance happens to Mio-san,

how would Aoba feel? She's a precious mother to her, you know?"

Taiyou said with a harsh, cold voice.

"But even if she's fine right now, we don't know what will happen after. I really do think that we need to chase after them."

"....."

Taiyou silently shook his head.

"Taiyou-chan——"

Hera thought to attempt to further convince him, but shut her mouth quickly.

"Taiyou-chan....."

"It's fine, it's fine. If something happened to Mio-san then that in itself would become a lifetime wound in Aoba's heart. So it's fine."

"Okay....."

"It's really fine."

He repeated those words frequently, almost like an incantation. His clenched fists became white with his nails dug in, red blood oozing throughout.

Chapter 124: I and Me / Shadow on the New Moon

Even in the middle of the party assembly hall with people wearing fine-tailored suits and gorgeous dresses, that place was especially letting off a radiance, gathering the attention of the participants.

That was wholly due to the social status of the three men and women facing each other in conversation.

Current Prime Minister, Kouda Jin'ichirou.

The third princess of Asia's most pro-Japan country, the Phili Kingdom: Leticia • H • Keraaz.

And lastly, Juunishima's headman's daughter of the place that was designated as a "village" based on its administrative district while having a population of a million, Juunishima Youran.

All of them were important people among important people, and it wouldn't be difficult to imagine something dreadful happening in the world if a meteorite or the like were to fall here. That was how important these faces were.

The three of them were conversing in Japanese without any interpreter.

"Good gracious, I am relieved that her Highness as well as Director of the New Moon-dono haven't changed."

"Good heavens, Jin'ichirou-ojisama, we last met three years ago. Do you not think that saying that there has been no change in a maiden of sixteen after three years is rather awful?"

Leticia said clad in an evening dress, and the kimono-clad Youran sympathized with that.

"Besides, you say that even though Kouda-sama is the one who hasn't changed; you've held long-term political power since we were carrying our backpacks to grade school. Honestly, within me when I think of the prime minister I cannot imagine anyone else but Kouda-sama."

"I am of the same opinion."

"Hahhahaha, I lived too long and just decided to settle down in the position. It wouldn't be strange for a punishment to strike me by this point in time."

"You jest; even though there isn't the smidgen of an omen."

"Bamboo tubes don't fulfill their function until water accumulates."

"I take it that Ojisama's bamboo tubes are functioning as always; no doubt things will be tranquil from here on out."

"I think so too."

"Hahhahaha, what a day this is; I did not think that two goddesses of luck would show up all at once."

"Oh, you're skilled, Ojisama."

An almost false, surface-level dialogue. But that was the most important thing in this situation.

Jin'ichirou, Leticia, and Youran.

The open-book friendship displayed between the leaders meant that things were just that secure.

After the party, Youran and Leticia were in the storeroom. A pretty suit room with a nightview on the top floor of the hotel, where the party had begun a moment ago.

In its midst, the two of them were sitting down facing each other.

"Why did you want to speak with me?"

"Oh, do you mean to speak with me in that tone as well?"

"Thou art the one with the strange speech; thou weren't like that when we last met, right?"

"I acquired it; does it not fit my position quite well?"

"When I first heard it I felt goosebumps all over; it doesn't fit thou so just quit it."

"If you stop first then I shall do that very thing."

"Thou shalt go first."

"You shall be going first."

"Thou"

"You"

Neither side giving in, it became a battle of obstinance. And just when things

seemed to be heading in the opposite direction of the party assembly hall to a stormy situation...

"Pff"

"Ahahahaha"

As if they had conspired together, both of them burst out laughing at once. Evening dress and kimono; the two people who had earlier made a refined atmosphere had shattered said atmosphere at once by their own hand.

"Man, what are we even doing?"

"Ya got that right; it ain't ev'n like us, furreal."

"Ahh, I can relax listening to you speak that way."

"My own long-sleeved kimono • • • seeing that is what helps me relax."

"Vainly trying to be knowledgeable about the Japanese culture, I see, you false foreigner you."

"Can't be 'elped; we're Asia's most pro-Japan country and our official language's even Japanese anyhoo. 'Course we'd be knowledgeable 'bout Japan's culture, eh?"

"Yes yes. And, what did you invite me here for?"

"Seems like ya sister was found."

"....."

The air immediately grew cold; Youran had not anticipated that she would bring up this topic of all things.

"Dun make such a scary face, eh?"

"How did you know?"

"This's somethin' 'portant that can decide the future o' my close friend; 'course I'd be concerned."

"Should I say thank you?"

"I really dun care. More 'portantly, your little sis...wha was 'er name"

Leticia thought a bit.

"Right right, Shiro, Shiro, ain't it?"

"It's Pochi...or not even that; it's Juunishima Adano. The name decided for her before birth just like mine."

"Thas' a shame, having a father who's obsessed with England. 'S that some

sorta glittering fashionable name nowadays?"

"Don't say that; thought it may seem otherwise I quite like my name."

"That right? It's fine if that's th'case."

Leticia said, softly narrowing her eyes.

"An' where's dat Shiro?"

".....I don't know."

"Dun lie."

"I'm not lying, I really don't know."

"Right, but the face yer makin' 's like ya have everythin' figured out."

"I won't deny that, but I don't know where she is."

"Wha, ya get 'er to go underground?"

"I haven't done anything."

"Haah"

Leticia laughed scornfully.

"Yer the same as always. I always hated dat useless aspect of yers. Doin' everythin' on yer own, and once ya decided than ya'd dash off without a word to anyone. Ain't it the same now?"

"That sort of way is better a lot more, when you're in my position. You've got to understand."

"Most unfortunately! I dun do anythin' like dat; if my subordinates were to do something good then I'd let 'em handle it."

"Your subordinates must have it hard."

"Contrary, yer subordinates must 'ave it rough. How many people d'ya think yer causing trouble for?"

"You think so?"

"I do."

".....You might be right."

Taking a breath, Youran said nodding.

(You might be right)

Youran repeated the same words in her heart.

That might very well be the case. Whenever something happened, she had a habit of not letting anyone els ehandle it and trying to do something with her

power alone. Even for things that should be left to subordinates, she still felt that she should handle.

And she didn't just feel that way; she had actually set that in motion. But just like Leticia had said, there must be a lot of people who were inconvenienced as a result.

A certain boy's face floated in her head.

Just like the name, the type of boy who emitted brightness from himself. Even with the previous affair, she had inconvenienced him. If she had that one time not gone herself, instead sending a trustworthy tight-lipped confidant and had things proceed that way, surely that boy would not have suffered any wounds. Things would have continued more thoroughly and a solution would have been found after a bit of a struggle.

Youran was not so foolish that she couldn't comprehend that that was unmistakable.

Even so, though she acknowledged the reasoning itself, she couldn't repudiate the actions themselves.

Because she couldn't afford to.

"Wazzup with you; suddenly spacing out."

"Eh? No it's nothing."

"That right? Well that's fine; all I wanted to say was to rely more on those around ya. Even if things 'ave been peachy so far dun mean that it'll stay that way for yer whole life."

"Yeah, then allow me to do so from now on."

"If you really intended to . . . then ya just gotta say that you'll [positively consider it]."

Leticia angrily turned her face away. From how long they had been tagging along with each other, she had probably understood that Youran was just glossing over it with her answer.

She had angered her; feeling that, Youran searched for follow-up words.

That was when the sound of a knock was heard on the door.

Knock-knock, knock-knock; four knocks struck rhythmically.

"Enter."

Youran had immediately reverted to her "archaic" self.

"Excuse the disturbance."

Entering the room and deeply bowing was a woman with a maid outfit in her mid-twenties.

After shooting Leticia a glance, she talked to Youran.

"My master, a report of imminent danger."

"Let us hear it."

"Is that really fine?"

"I'm a foreigner, I don't eat Japanese, kay?"

Leticia attempted humor while insinuating that she wouldn't repeat it to anyone, and Youran also nodded to that, so the maid began her report.

"A report from the third squadron."

".....Oof"

"About the pursuit; Miki Aoba has been kidnapped by the hands of the Adano sect, the implementation force's leader being Einsteelpierre • Saekusa Tsukumo. When she was kidnapped, Akita Mio who was accompanying her suffered wounds and is currently receiving treatment in a hospital."

"....."

The desire to ask about the other person came up to her throat, but she resisted it.

"Afterwards, Natsuno Taiyou disappeared, and a search is currently undergoing."

"——"

Youran stood up with a clatter.

"Ya....."

Leticia who had been silent knit her brows. The maid was also surprised. Youran who had stood up abruptly was making a face that they had never seen before.

The waxing moon floating in the summer night sky, the new moon was slowly being eroded by shade (light).

Chapter 125: I and Me / Armor of the Heart

Until now there had not been a human whose emotions were this much in disarray.

Even her father would interact with her like a stranger.

It was the same for those around her; there were some people who used their position and this angered her, but the reason was made clear, so continuing in rage or lingering on the topic wasn't something that she did.

So she didn't understand these feelings. She couldn't understand these feelings that she just kept thinking about asleep or awake.

She would just always think of that boy.

What in the world are these feelings?

After standing up, Youran realized her error. The maid Michiyo was there, and so was her dear friend Leticia. It was unmistakably an error to become distraught in front of them.

While coughing over the incident, Youran slowly sat back down.

"What did the pursuit squadron do?"

"My apologies; it was a simple human error. You may punish our wrongdoing as you see fit."

The maid Michiyo deeply lowered her head. Of the many maids, Youran had taken a liking to her personality of not making excuses, and there had been numerous events that had made her want to have her by her side.

Normally that would be fine, but for some reason this time she was dissatisfied with what had happened.

Even so, Youran was Youran. Outstretching her muscles tightly, she said magnanimously.

"It is fine, I forgive you. More importantly you must begin searching; do whatever is necessary to grasp that boy's location."

"Certainly."

"Leave."

Michiyo gracefully bowed, retreating out of the room.

"What was that just now?"

"What, what is it?"

"The Natsuno boy, is this what it was about?"

Leticia said, raising a small finger. Having a blond-haired blue-eyed orthodox-schooled princess appearance, this mannerism was too surreal for her.

On the other hand, since entering the room, Leticia had fit this atmosphere she was exhibiting quite well.

"What do you mean this?"

"That he's your lover."

"Lov——You're wrong!"

Youran immediately became red-faced, retorting. She thought that being distrusted in that manner had no basis

"What, I'm wrong? But you do seem fairly sweaty."

"I owe him! W-Well...it's no mistake that he saved my life."

"Here's quite the character for ya. Director of the New Moon-sama's benefactor, eh? And?"

"Whaddya mean "and"?"

"He's yer lifesaver right? So don't you need to repay that? Like...the repayment of the crane?"

"I'm going to get angry."

Leticia further messed with her. Whether it be the undignified gestures or the expression of mischief that she was even now displaying. This was not at all like the princess of a country.

Youran felt the slightest amount of unpleasantness to her persistence.

"Don't get so mad; all I did was talk 'bout the proper procedure of repaying the favor."

"You have too much ill intent with saying that."

"Kay, I won't say no more. In exchange ya gotta tell me."

"What?"

"How he saved your life. It's ya so I imagine it was when ya were sneekin' around, but I want to hear more info."

"It's not really anything important."

Although she said that, Youran talked to Leticia about the event of her meeting Taiyou.

Normally this would be treated as a top-secret affair, but she opened everything up as this was a place where no one could eavesdrop and it was with someone she could trust.

"Wow, quite the interesting chap. The type that yer sisters would like. As a person, 'course."

Leticia forestalled, but Youran become sullen in another meaning of the word.

"Don't say sisters."

"Why; they born of a different mother?"

"That is true, but"

"There's like sixty people we got, at least as far as siblings from a different mother are concerned."

"That's because your place is a royal family of polygamy."

"Sorry, counting now there weren't more than thirty people."

"That's quite the miscount! And even so that's still a lot!"

"The one thing I can brag about it miscounting, ya know? Sort of like saying

"Hey, I lost a kilogram" even though ya only lost 900 grams."

"Why?"

"You're really earnest aren'tcha."

"I don't really understand but what I do understand is that you've been continuously badmouthing me from earlier."

"But I see, that boy did go missing and all, so I get why ya'd be panicked."

"I'm not really panicking."

"Ya need assistance? Might I lend ya my knight bunch?"

"It's not that important. Besides——"

"Besides?"

Leticia asked back, and Youran hesitated.

Because she didn't even know really what she intended to say after "besides". So she found a vague reason that wasn't by any means a lie and distorted things.

"Because it'd be a lot of work to pacify the Phili kingdom's knights' subordinates for meritorious deeds."

"Well, that is also true. Sorry fer buttin' in."

Youran shook her head.

She knew very well that Leticia had offered that out of kindness. She could put on different faces for public and private matters, but she had only one personality.

Youran had always admired her for that.

After Leticia had returned elsewhere, Youran spent time looking down at the scenery.

The night scenery had dazzling comparable to the capital. For each of those, in exchange for burning fuel there was performance gained, there was a story, and there was peace.

Until now she had never thought much when she had looked down, but for some reason she couldn't relax today.

"Somewhere in there...I wonder if he's there."

She murmured to no one in particular.

Touching the glass, a cool feeling spread to the palm of her hand.

She felt a delusion that along with her body heat, something was also being sucked out of her heart.

She gazed at herself reflected in the glass. There was Juunishima Youran, wearing a long-sleeved kimono; the human who armed her heart with authority.

"....."

Rustle.

Untying her sash silently, the clothing that was the long-sleeved kimono fell upon the rug with plenty of dignity.

Discarding even the last garment, Youran became naked in front of the glass. The form she had taken when she was born; the body type that had voluptuous breasts. The graceful form of a young lady was there.

After briefly gazing, she combed her hair that wrapped about her like a mantle, arranging twintails at the sides of her head.

She looked once more at herself reflected in the glass. Compared to before, her atmosphere was quite different.

The satisfied appearance from earlier shifted its image one hundred eighty degrees, and even if she were to pass by someone who knew her she doubted they would recognize her.

But now the viewpoint had been thoroughly changed.

What reflected in the glass was a girl forcing a jovial expression with her back straightened tensely.

From the way she stood, there was something that she couldn't quite hide. When that was identified, by her, even she began to think so.

".....Haah"

Staring briefly at that appearance, she then breathed a sigh.

In the end, Youran still hadn't been able to stop that. The moment had thoroughly coated her body and wouldn't remove itself.

She must think of a more different disguise.

She thought, and when she thought to call the maid to change clothes from the long-sleeved kimono...

"——Hyan"

She suddenly felt like something had caught on to her. She felt like one twintail was being gripped and pulled.

She immediately turned around, but no one was in the vast suit room.

Of course. It was inconceivable that anyone would enter here without her permission.

She wasn't being pulled in the first place. She only felt that she was being tugged at, and when she had calmed down and thought about it, she saw herself standing upright not moving.

No one was there and nothing was being done to her.

Youran massaged her head; massaged the base of the twintails done into two. It was like the sensation remained there; like it had been revived.

The sensation of having that boy fooling around with her unannounced.

"Seriously, what do you think my body is."

Youran said, heading for the opposite end of the room. Quitting the notion

of calling the servant to return to her previous appearance, her long twintails swayed as she walked.

From the luggage in the corner of the room, there was clothing that Juunishima Youran would never wear: a casual outfit comprised of t-shirt and skirt.

Yurikago.

Remembering what she had referred to herself as once, Youran put her arms through the sleeves.

The aura that could not be hidden remained that way, and she became a beautiful girl of an opposite vector from before.

"Everything is his fault. I won't rest until I meet him directly and give a complaint or two."

Stealthily escaping, Youran breathed out those words resentfully. There was something about her mouth as she become thoroughly smaller, reflected in the window glass further away. There was a smile on her face that she didn't realize was there.

Chapter 126: I and Me / Director of the New Moon

In the train that was racing through the night in Juunishima, a disguised Youran slipped into the group of passengers.

She had ordered the maid Michiyo to continue the search for Taiyou, telling her to contact upon finding his location. Until that was cleared up, she figured she would first head to the hospital.

"Look at this."

"What?[New Moon-sama looks even cuter when idle.].....What is this? Your Japanese is screwed up."

"....."

She could hear two men of the community conversing. It seemed that . . . she had been brought up as a topic, so Youran secretively listened in.

"If she became cute then it's not a problem saying she became cute. What's wrong with saying that she looks cute while idle?"

"She's New Moon-sama. You realize that you need to use the appropriate words."

"The heck? So what do I gotta do, refer to her head and butt as sir?"

"I'M GOING TO SLAUGHTER YOU!"

One of the men gave off a threatening voice.

"I get it, calm down. And what is this?"

"It's a picture of New Moon-sama. It's the one that was taken earlier by the mass media with the prime minister and princess of Phili."

"Oh, it was on the news. I think it was some sort of conference or whatnot?"

"Yeah.....New Moon-sama is so cute....."

The man let out an ecstatic voice.

"I feel like I can do anything if it's for New Moon-sama."

"Anything? So if she tells you to die then you'll die?"

The other man was not being malicious; he simply was questioning him.

"Of course! If she says "Will you fight and die for me?" then I'll take a round trip of all the world's disputed regions."

"You're exaggerating. And do you really understand New Moon-sama? I don't think someone like her would say "my". She is refined after all."

"Very true! [My cause] or [My sake] would probably be more accurate!"
(Sorry, but I don't use either of those.)

Youran quipped in her head.

She was listening to the men gossiping about her like it was an everyday thing.

Youran, Juunishima's New Moon Director.

A few years ago, she had this title added to her actual name.

Bombastically adhering to formalities, this name was the proof of being this island's sovereign.

Since then, she had been called "New Moon-sama" by the island's residents.

The name of the family that had served the island for generations and the appearance that she had been born with.

Thanks to those things, Youran believed that she was looked upon favorably by the island's citizens. She confirmed with the men's conversation that this was the case.

"Oh, she's just so cute! New Moon-sama, she's totally the new moon."

"What do you mean by "totally the new moon", you mean "angel"!"

"Don't put New Moon-sama with the likes of an angel! That's blasphemy!"

"O-Okay, sorry."

"Ahh, New Moon-sama...I wonder if she'll have a handshake event."

".....You sure you aren't the one who's blaspheming New Moon-sama the most?"

Exasperated at what his friend said, he said "Really now".

"I just looked it up now, but there's actually a New Moon cram school."

Hearing what he said, Youran peeked over her shoulders. Both had their smartphones out, and she could see the big LCD screens displaying websites.

"That's right. New Moon-sama isn't just some transcendent beauty. She's been providing assistance to kids without relatives and the like. While putting

the talents of the children to use, she recruits the shining ones as her subordinates."

"Whoaaa."

"Yeah.....I also wanna be New Moon-sama's subordinate.....Guess I'll beat my old man to death."

"Wait until you find a way to return to being a child."

The man who was behaving in a violent manner, and the friend who was calmly evading him.

Listening for some time, Youran's mind drifted off.

Those were conversations that she had heard numerous times up until now, all lacking originality.

Even amongst the members of Juunishima, she boasted an immense amount of popularity. If she were to face off against her father, the current head, in a democratic election, she would probably win with an overwhelming vote of 98%.

She was that popular.

So what exactly could she do to answer to her vast amount of popularity and support? Swaying in the train, Youran continued to think about that.

Having arrived at the hospital, Youran went straight to Akita Mio's room, having heard about it previously. Mio was resting on a bed in the two-person room of the general hospital wing. An IV tube was attached to her arm, and the exposed skin peeked out from bandages.

Her face was a color of the worst degree, and she wasn't even conscious.

"Oh, who might you be?"

"——"

A voice approached her from behind as she was staring at Mio. Turning around, she saw a woman of about the same age as Mio.

With a gentle expression and strong bright clear eyes, this woman was exhibiting a special gentle, refined human aura.

From the report about Miki Aoba's three mothers, she was able to immediately grasp that this was Atsuko.

"An acquaintance of Mio-san's?"

"No, I'm Natsuno-kun's friend. I heard that he was here earlier."

"I passed by him as he left the room."

"Do you know where he went?"

"No clue."

Atsuko came to Mio's side, peering at her closely to check her condition. As if seeing something reassuring, her face from the side had a clear color of relief paint it, and Youran didn't miss that detail.

"When I came, he passed by me and went somewhere. Said that he had something to do."

"Something to do?"

"Yeah."

Atsuko nodded, but she seemed to be implicitly saying that she wouldn't explain anything else.

Youran was puzzled. From the information provided by Michiyo, the mothers' beloved daughter Aoba was abducted, and yet Atsuko didn't seem to be minding that at all.

At least that was what Youran thought. She was a bit concerned.

"Umm, is that person fine?"

"Huh? Hmm, well the doctor said that she won't die, so I'm sure she is."

"I see."

"Seems like there will be some wounds remaining on her body though."

"Umm.....might I introduce a doctor? I know an plastic surgeon who's skilled at that stuff. They're a little weird, but they're very skilled as healing women's wounds."

"Thanks, but I don't think that Mio-san would want that."

Atsuko made a slightly exasperated expression.

Youran wondered why she said such things with such an expression.

"Wouldn't want that?"

"Yeah, I haven't heard it from her, but I sort of get it. When Mio got injured, Aoba—That's my daughter's name by the way—she was trying to protect Aoba, I think. I don't think she'd want those wounds to be erased."

"Is that how it is?"

"Mio's stubborn, see."

A proud color was mixed within Atsuko's exasperated smile.
Seeing that appearance, Youran . . . envisioned something in her head.

"Is that Youran-chan there?"

Leaving the hospital room, she heard a carefree voice. She initially jumped at her name being called, but without revealing any of that, she turned toward the voice.
There stood a 30 centimeter, human-shaped organism with blonde hair floating in the air without wings—a fairy.
Youran silently turned aside, heading to the other side of the building.

"Did you not hear my voice? Wait—"

The fairy Hera cried out in a loud voice, following suit. She caught up to Youran in an instant, overtaking her in front of her face.

"Look over here! Ignoring me is a no-no—. That's weird. Can you no longer see me?"

Youran continued to ignore her. After finally reaching a place where there were no people around, she turned back to Hera and opened her mouth.

"Long time no see."

"Long time no see, Youran-chan. So you really can see me."

"I'm the only one who can see you there, right? If someone saw me conversing with you there then they'll think I'm a poor, stupid girl."

"Oh, that is very true."

"So why are you here?"

"I was asked by Taiyou-chan. He wanted me to stay here and notify him if anything happened to Aoba's mother."

"Okay, and, where is he?"

"I don't know. I can get to Taiyou-chan's side quickly, but I don't know where he is whenever he goes to a new place."

"You can't show me the way?"

"I'm sorry."

"No, it's fine. Then later on, let him know that I'm searching for him. You can do that, right?"

"I understand. I will inform him."

Hera said, immediately disappearing. It was like she had teleported. If she could teleport then she'd probably return soon. Youran assumed that, waiting there briefly, but no matter how much she waited, Hera showed no signs of returning.

What's wrong? Did something happen?

She was slightly panicking, and just like that, the phone she was holding rang. The LCD screen displayed a call from "Michiyo", so Youran returned to the stiff version of herself, answering the call.

"What has happened?"

[Milady, we've grasped Natsuno Taiyou's whereabouts.]

"——Ngh!"

Chapter 127: I and Me / Aura

Youran took a deep breath, calming herself down. And with the usual attitude, she inquired from Michiyo.

"Where is he?"

[He is in the multi-tenant building two kilometers ahead northeast from where Milady is.]

"Multi-tenant building? Why there?"

[From what we investigated, that seems to be Tsubaki-sama's possession.]

"So that's how it is."

Hearing that name, Youran quickly became satisfied.

There was a faction within Juunishima that backed Adano Pochi against Youran.

Juunishima Tsubaki was one of the people in the center of that, as well as the master of Saekusa Tsukumo who had assaulted Taiyou on the ship.

The image of a woman with rich heavy makeup floated in her head.

Youran had taken on the name of [Director of the New Moon] and had the number one spot in terms of inheritance rights, but on the other hand, Tsubaki held quite a bit of authority with enough power to resist.

In order to further increase that power, she would do things like try to chase Youran out or harass her with trivial things.

She already knew this time that the one who attacked Taiyou aboard the ferry was the protégé Saekusa Tsukumo, so she understood that Tsubaki was heavily involved. So she was able to immediately grasp why the disappeared Taiyou was in Tsubaki's personal building.

"....."

Thinking briefly, Youran spoke in a low voice.

"You are familiar with my location, are you not?"

[Yes.]

"Then inform me about the route to get there. Just send it to my device."

[Understood.]

She said hanging up, and then after a brief wait, mail from Michiyo arrived.

Opening it, there were images and writing that minutely noted the way to the destination.

"Fast as ever, I see."

Youran muttered, returning to her informal way of speaking. There was probably a favorable nuance toward her retainer elsewhere. Removing her eyes from the cell, she surveyed her surroundings once. This was the back of the hospital building with no one else in sight. She had been waiting since earlier, but as usual . . . she couldn't detect Hera anywhere. Having received the additional information about Taiyou being in Tsubaki's building, she thought that something might be happening. Then as there was no point in remaining, Youran made her way out of the hospital.

Driving the information of the mail into her head, she headed out to the destination. She wasn't familiar with the land around these parts, but it seemed like everything would go well thanks to Michiyo's informative mail. And as she was heading to her destination, the phone rang once again. Wondering what it was this time, she stopped and looked at the screen. Doing so, there was a familiar number there that wasn't registered. She hesitated about whether to answer, but those who knew this number were quite few, so Youran decided to go ahead and answer.

[Airhead— — — —]

"Hyaa!"

All of a sudden, a high-volume yelling voice from the receiver shot her eardrum. It was the kind of voice that made her instinctively separate herself from the phone and cover her ears.

It was a voice and manner of speaking that she was used to. It had to be Leticia E Keraaz, who was supposed to have returned to her lodging place soon after parting ways.

As she was wondering what in the world this was about, her friend asked again in a loud voice that could be heard even without being next to the receiver.

[Where are ya?]

"Hey! You're too loud. What's up all of a sudden? I'm going to sleep soon, okay?"

[Airhead.]

Leticia repeated the same phrase.

[I'm in yer room right now.]

"Eh?"

[I had stuff to ask ya 'bout tomorrow and then when I came ya weren't there. Where ya loitering around?]

"Y-You're in my room right now?"

[S'right.]

"And my body double?"

[The lass is at the seat of honor. She was making an irritated face after all.]

"We have the same faces. She's my body double after all."

[Hah]

Hearing her burst out snickering, Youran inclined her head at what she meant by "Hah".

[More 'portantly, I didn' ask earlier, but where are ya?]

Realizing that if she was already in the room there would be no more point in bluffing, Youran decided to admit it.

"Some minor business."

[What, ya going on a date?]

"No! Anyway, what do you want?"

She wasn't going on a date, but it was true that she was going to meet with a man. And if that area was pecked at then things would become abnormally complicated with their conversation, so Youran attempted to avoid that by steering the conversation to Leticia's business with her.

[It's about tomorrow's plan. Ya were going to come with me to go to various facilities and give 'em our condolences, right? I came to discuss that with ya.]

"Condolences?"

[What's up with that tone. You haven't heard?]

".....Yeah, cause I left all the scheduling to Michiyo."

Youran frowned. She had indeed left the scheduling to Michiyo and had heard nothing at all.

She had heard that the schedule tuning was finished, but if she knew that then she would have desisted from doing this.

Leticia was visiting Japan as a state guest, and any schedule that involved accompanying her was to be prioritized.

Michiyo had said that it would be alright.

"Twenty-four hours at most....."

[Haah? Ya say somethin'?]

"No, nothing."

Youran shook her head. It seemed like her muttering had transmitted to the other side via the electromagnetic waves.

".....Seems like I'll return by tomorrow, but if by any chance I'm not there, go ahead and attend with the body double. That should be fine."

[Your head messed up?]

"Eh? What do you mean?"

Youran was taken aback. It was a last resort, but there shouldn't have been a reason to have her be spoken about so disparagingly.

[No way this lass could substitute for ya.]

"Why not? Up until now she's always——"

[This lass doesn't have the aura.]

"Aura....."

Youran smiled wryly, wondering what she was getting on about.

[Ya might wanna get to know yerself a bit more. It's all well and good if ya do things across the tv screen or wave yer hands from far away, but the thing tomorrow is a bit stretchin' it for an actor. When giving condolences, you'll be doing things like takin' people's hands and saying a thing or two.]

"That's true, but.....is it really that bad?"

[Course it is. Your brain tissue lower than miso soup?]

Having said that strongly, Leticia let a small sigh escape.

[So ya can't come back right now.]

She asked to clarify.

Youran felt a slight pang of guilt in response to her close friend's softened attitude.

"Yeah, sorry. I don't know if I'll make it in time for tomorrow morning. But I'll try my best to make it in time——"

[Don't make promises that ya can't keep.]

Leticia bluntly cut her off.

[I get it. At worst I'll just say that you had a sudden illness.]

".....Sorry."

[S'fine. More importantly, ya'd best prepare yerself, cause I'm gonna ask ya a lotta questions.]

Saying those last words, Leticia ended the call.

Remembering the word "aura" that she had used, Youran giggled, but that smile soon disappeared.

"Michiyo.....What are you doing?"

She felt slight dissatisfaction with her retainer about the schedule. Until now throughout all that had happened, she had trusted Michiyo and entrusted her with all the responsibility. But she didn't so much as even tell her about the plans with the state guest.

The one to ultimately decided on that was herself, but she couldn't even make judgements if there wasn't any materials to judge.

At the very least, she would likely have drawn back tonight if she had known. But there was no point in saying that by this time.

Youran organized the objective and the circumstances in her head. The plan was for tomorrow morning, which meant...

"Hurry up and go, and hurry up and come back is all I need to do."

She thought, once again walking in the direction of the destination building. She walked comparatively faster than before the phone call. That was natural, as there were not at most 24 hours but rather only a few hours. She advanced through the night streets along the route stored in her head. Before long, she reached the place of destination that Michiyo notified her about.

The six floor multi-tenant building on the outskirts of town had its lights on. Looking up at it, she did not immediately enter, instead taking out her compact mirror for some reason.

Using it, she checked her appearance. After confirming that there was nothing off about her reflection in the mirror, she took a deep breath and stepped into the building.

And the minute she went through the entrance, the shutters behind her fell with a crash.

Chapter 128: I and Me / An Unexpected Chain of Events

Looking back with a start, she touched the shutter. It wasn't of the typical light variety that made crashing sounds, but a product that you could tell had a heavy weight preventing it from even budging.

It had the outer appearance of a typical shutter, but had the imagery of thick steel plating.

In an instant, various thoughts rushed about dizzily in Youran's head. She suddenly took out her cell phone, and just as expected . . . she confirmed that it was out of range.

"I've either been entrapped, or they always do this to intruders."

Youran thought that her actions would depend on that.

She briefly stood on the spot. She wanted to avoid making any bad moves and instead observe, but she couldn't detect any changes after a minute.

With her means of escape cut off, all she could do was progress forward.

Regaining her composure, she looked in front of her. This was a passageway that continued from the entryway about twenty meters deep to the back, and the old fluorescent lamps were engendering an indefinable atmosphere.

Putting caution to the max level and progressing slowly, there was an old elevator and staircase on either side at the back of the passageway.

She definitely couldn't ride on an elevator in this abnormal situation, so Youran turned to the other entrance, and after confirming that the shutters were still closed, she went up the stairs.

"Eh?"

She unintentionally let out a voice. Looking from outside, it was a six floor multi-tenant building, but the staircase actually ended at the second floor.

Going up to the second floor and out into the passageway, she could see a long passageway stretching straight to the other side.

She could see the next staircase indistinctly ahead.

And there weren't any windows.

Immediately, the composition in Youran's head rose up. A huge spiral staircase that took up the entire building.

"This was made as a countermeasure for attacks, wasn't it...wow....."

It was a sight enough to make her unintentionally moan.

If the staircase went all the way up to the top, then the people who entered the building would be able to dash all the way up to the top. But with this setup, having to go to the other side of the building every time you climbed up the stairs to reach the next staircase was enough in itself to extend the travelling distance to enable the gaining of time in many ways.

It goes without saying that a typical building would not find any need whatsoever to do that, since it's inconvenient.

But inconvenience would turn the situation around when the time was right. When an outside enemy came, you could buy time.

She recognized yet another thing.

The area around the elevator seen on the first floor was a complete wall.

Whether it didn't stop on the second floor or whether the elevator itself was a dummy, she wasn't sure.

But what she was sure of was the shutter at the entrance, the huge spiral staircase, and the mysterious elevator.

The three elements combined, she truly felt that the situation had become bad.

"Well if it isn't a Kazue Yakuman!"

She said jokingly, but her heart was one with the stagnant air of the building. Her mood had significantly sunk.

Despite that, she couldn't just stop here, so she readied herself and advanced even further.

Footsteps awfully resounding, she went up the stairs of troublesome making.

When she at last reached the highest sixth floor of the building, there was just one lone unrefined door.

With no other places to enter before here and with the entrance blocked off, it was as if the door were beckoning and saying "Come, come over here". The door was where one would arrive upon advancing straight through the multi-tenant-like building.

She was being lured in, but there was nothing else to do about it.

Then, at least.

Youran took a breath, outstretching her spine stiffly as she put her hand on the doorknob, entering inside.

"Good evening. This is the news from the morning."

A chair was left in the center of the empty room, and sitting in it was one man, legs spread wide apart. He had his hands folded above his thighs, upper body leaning forward.

He was a youth halfway in his twenties, and if he would remain quiet then he'd be quite the reasonable man. But Youran knew that if this man were to open his mouth, he would blurt out nothing but bizarre words.

"Saekusa Tsukumo."

"Do you got a mother-daughter bowl there?"

"Sorry, but I hate those things."

"You say that you hate mother-daughter bowls? I misjudged you, New Moon-sama."

Tsukumo lashed out with an angry expression. No, she just didn't like those fruitless, meaningless exchanges.

From the information gathered, ninety percent of the conversations that Tsukumo had were of that variety, and from meeting him for the first time, she understood in an instant that this was certainly the case.

(Is that his true self, or he is acting? I wonder which it is)

She secretly thought, looking at her surroundings in order to seize the initiative with the conversation.

"Where's the exit?"

"You know, New Moon-sama, I think your okaa-sama is pretty good too. She doesn't often come out into the open so it's a pain searching for pictures and whatnot, but I think that the effort it requires is well worth it."

"How about I introduce you after you let me out? I heard that person is having difficulty finding eligible men right now."

"Comparing New Moon-sama and Okaa-sama...mhmhm. Your Okaa-sama really treasures you, so that could be an idea for making a threat with the arms and legs spread. Afterwards, having them say[Didn't you say you wouldn't lay hands

on my daughter?]is the best. The finest."

"Sorry but I didn't really get any of that."

"This is common knowledge, you know ? ! "

Tsukumo said with exaggerated surprise, making an expression on his face as if to ask why she didn't understand, which Youran simply looked at coldly.

"Basically, you're saying that your objective is to capture me and have fun with me and that person together."

"That's right."

"Hmm, is that so."

""Is that so"? New Moon-sama says it like it's not her problem——"

"I'm glad that Tsubaki's right-hand man just so happens to be the kind of man who is obsessed with his own interests. Everything will be considerably easy from here on."

"....."

Tsukumo's face changed color and he closed his mouth.
Youran shouted with exultation in her heart.

"So have you secured that person already? If not then I can contact them"

".....I've established myself to be Tsubaki-sama's loyal subordinate."

"Can you stop fooling around already?"

"I am not fooling around. At the same time, I've established myself to be a man who likes mother-daughter bowls more than anything. Those two coexist and the former is prioritized, is all."

Tsukumo said, laughing depreciatively.

"A bit of a miss on my part...No, that has to be established as the highest priority. Well anyway, there's nothing I can do about it."

"So what do you plan to do to me? Do you really want to line us up on the bed?"

"If it's possible to implement without orders then I'd like to do so. Cause I've established myself in that manner."

"So?"

"I don't know that much. I'm here, and I've been ordered to thoroughly capture New Moon-sama, is all."

"You're still calling me by that name, I see."

".....I'll have the privilege of treating you courteously until the next order comes. I ask that you be content with that."

Knowing that Tsukumo was implicitly telling her not to resist, Youran surveyed her surroundings, perceiving that escape with her own strength was impossible.

"What will you do until then? You're not going to seriously continue to be here, right?"

"I will seriously be here."

"If I'm here too long then help will come. The electromagnetic waves from my cell aren't transmitting right now, but they can get all sorts of information from knowing that I came near here."

"Even so, they will not come."

".....Why?"

Youran furrowed her brow, not being able to understand why he was able to say that with certainty.

Tsukumo took out his own smartphone, showing Youran the screen. She didn't immediately understand what his intentions were, but she soon realized that the electromagnetic waves were transmitting through it.

With an intense expression, she took out her own cell, and it still had no signal, out of range.

She took turns looking at her cell and Tsukumo's face.

"This building isn't jammed in the slightest."

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean is that New Moon-sama's cell is the only thing that became unusable by pinpointing it."

"..... ? "

Even being explained to, she couldn't immediately understand. She searched through her head for knowledge of potential techniques or methods used for that.

"That cell's contract has been cancelled, you see."

".....I see."

Youran was convinced, able to understand that. Certainly, if that were the case, then it would be possible to make only her cell unusable by pinpointing it. She had the initial impression that jamming was being used, which was why it had taken time for her thoughts to reach that point.

"Even so, nothing has changed. They'll realize that I've come here and——"

Youran stopped talking with a start.

Because the origin of her thoughts had been different, her thought process hadn't only delayed on the situation of the cell.

Well, it was unquestionable that the cell was involved in there. By the point that she had heard of the cell she used being halted, she should have suspected something.

But Youran hadn't realized; she had not had the slightest idea.

"Don't tell me....."

Not directly answering Youran with her stiffened face, Tsukumo began a phone call with the smartphone. Not putting it to his ears, he set the speaker to on and a sound came out.

The mechanical sounds of connecting rang, and then shortly afterward...

"Hello?"

She could hear a woman's voice from the speaker.

A familiar voice that she heard on a daily basis: the woman's voice that she had heard just earlier from her cell.

"Michiyo....."

This was the voice of the one who Youran regarded as a trusted friend; the voice of the maid who had supported her for a long time as her right hand.

Chapter 129: I and Me / Great Actor

"What's the meaning of this?"

The words that came straight out of her mouth displayed her state of mind as it was.

She didn't think that she would hear that voice of all things here, and she could hear an extremely calm voice.

Serious, but not cornered. At the very least, this was not the voice of a retainer who grasped the current situation of one's master being captured by one's enemy.

That was the kind of voice she had heard from Tsukumo's smartphone.

Various thoughts recurred in her head, and Youran once again responded.

"Do you understand the situation that I am in?"

[Of course I do. I'm viewing your situation over there via video after all.]

"You seem rather composed despite that."

"Well yeah, that's cause she's doing this of her free will."

"What do you mean?"

"I like that version of New Moon-sama as well; she's strongly high-minded and refined. She feels like the heroine of the era—the century."

"I thought I told you I wasn't into that sort of thing."

"But I like that kind of thing; so much so that I want to reset myself as soon as possible."

"Michiyo!"

[.....]

She roughened her voice, but there was no response from the smartphone speakers. She could hear the faintest respiration, but nothing more.

She called her name once again, but expectedly, there was no answer.

Youran understood that attempting to press questions wouldn't make her respond. Changing her target, she turned to Tsukumo and asked him.

"What are your objectives? I cannot comprehend why Juunishima Tsubaki has resorted to these violent actions at this point in time."

"I hear that it's exactly because it's this point in time. Doesn't New Moon-sama

actually also comprehend the situation?"

"I understand the part about Adano's whereabouts being found, but I cannot comprehend why I need to be captured now."

"New Moon-sama is unexpectedly pure."

"What are you getting at?"

Youran furrowed her brow, somewhat feeling she was being made fun of.

"At this rate, the next Juunishima head is decidedly New Moon-sama. You do after all hold the name[Director of the New Moon], and most importantly, your popularity among the island's citizens is exceptional. Even if Tsubaki-sama and Adano-sama paired together, that rank would not sway. You're thinking that, right New Moon-sama? That is correct."

"Quit the roundabout manner of speaking."

"We'd like to have New Moon-sama say with her mouth that she'll yield the inheritance rights to Adano-sama."

"You're telling me to yield in favor of a more virtuous successor?"

"Can't tell if those words are suitable for— —Nah, it's New Moon-sama so I guess they are. Yeah, that's right."

Tsukumo nodded, and Youran figured that if that were the case then she was satisfied with the answer.

It was true that Tsubaki grasped a certain degree of authority in Juunishima, but no matter how she used that power, the chances of her ascending to the head were equal to 0.

That was simply related to her lineage.

The causes of power struggles were generally classified into two categories. And in Juunishima, the modern anachronism of the name "Director of the New Moon" being used was more important than justification.

In this case, the ones who could be the next Juunishima head were only Youran and Adano Pochi, born from the current head's legal wife. Those who were not of the main line such as Tsubaki or Sakura, Anna, etc, could not get the chance unless Youran or Adano were to disappear.

That was why Tsubaki tried to support Adano. The problem there was that Youran already had her position solidified as the inheritor of the title of Director of the New Moon.

If Adano had perhaps been on Juunishima and grew up just like Youran, things may have been different, but even if she revealed herself by this point in time, that rank would not waver.

And if someone were to want to erase Youran, it wasn't that simple.

Tsubaki's objective was to have the discovered Adano inherit the headship, and no matter the procedure, people would appear who associated Adano's return with Youran's disappearance.

Youran had the support of island citizens numbering over a million; the majority. Even if an agenda were to be pushed within Juunishima, the island residents would not be satisfied with that.

It was to be expected that chaos would continue for a long period of time.

In the worst-case scenario, the now-gone Youran would be idolized/deified, remaining deep-rooted within the hearts of people.

The charisma gained from reaching an entirely new stage would be too much to even mention in all of history.

Youran understood that, and believed that Tsubaki also understood that.

So despite being a political opponent, Youran had in a sense believed completely in her safety.

Youran had believed that in fact if anything had happened to her then Tsubaki would assure her safety with all her effort.

"I see; it definitely seems like there's no other option."

"Sharp as usual, New Moon-sama. Your comprehension will save time."

"But I have no intention of doing that."

"So you have no intention of surrendering your authority?"

"I cannot entrust the lives of a million villagers with someone who has no readiness."

"The one with the real power would be Tsubaki-sama."

"Even if she's a puppet, if she had the resolve then the worst situation could be avoided. If that's not there then it's out of the question."

"Tsubaki-sama might very well have the resolve, right?"

"Not possible."

"Eh?"

"Juunishima Tsubaki is a vulgar person with no self-awareness. She's like a variety of the evil spirits of rivers and mountains, obsessed with greed for

hollow authority of the bottom. She has no such thing as resolve."

"Evil spirits and mountains? You're evaluating her pretty high."

"It would do you well to take out a dictionary."

" ? "

Tsukumo stared in puzzlement. Youran ignored him, carrying on the conversation.

"Anyhow, I have no intention of yielding this seat to Adano. No matter what is done to me."

"Well, that was also to be expected. So we made preparations."

"Preparations?"

"Tsubaki said that we have a specialist in brainwashing. That we'd take a long time in units of years as we fixed New Moon-sama's way of thinking."

"....."

Youran's face stiffened. She felt the most threatened in this very moment of this day.

"That's how it would be between New Moon-sama and Adano-sama There is groundwork; groundwork for the people around to be convinced, and all that would be left would be to have New Moon-sama say it directly from her mouth. Tsubaki-sama said that there are people prepared who can accomplish that."

".....No matter what you do to me, I will not change my views."

She tried saying firmly, but Youran was panicked internally. Brainwashing pros. Those words gave her a big impact. Youran thought of herself as the one who she distrusted the most in this world. Ever-changing, and a hopeless human who accepted too easily the influences of those around her.

If it was torture then she could endure it; feelings of revolt would be born within her.

But what Tsukumo said—The brainwashing pros that Tsubaki had prepared were probably not that.

Using various outlets: occasionally coercion, occasionally placation, they would probably try to begin to change Youran's way of thinking.

She had knowledge of those said methods, and she had absolutely no

confidence that she could endure them.

[Milady.]

Suddenly, Michiyo's voice came out from the smartphone speakers. She had totally forgotten, but it seemed that the call had continued on throughout.

[It would be best for you to surrender. This is not the sort of situation that you can make do of with obstinance.]

"....."

Youran became further cornered.

Michiyo was her right hand. Youran had entrusted her with trust as well as indirect authority with small and large things alike.

There was the working squadron under Youran's direct control, but in general, she sent them orders via Michiyo.

The fact that Michiyo had come to the other side also meant that there would be no people to the rescue.

Negative factors continuously piled up.

There was only one bright light left for her.

Because she valued justification, Tsubaki had chosen a drawn-out war. She had chosen to take time and reform Youran's thoughts.

In other words, danger was not imminent.

(If I can at least hold out here.....)

She thought, thinking to initially surrender, but...

"Huh? A catch, eh."

Tsukumo said, operating the smartphone giving off electric sounds. He put the receiver straight to his ear.

"Chan Suu, eh? How's the course of events?"

Youran cautioned herself when she heard "course of events". She braced herself for something still progressing outside of her knowledge.

"You got them, eh? Good job. Now listen, you need to treat 'em carefully; carefully."

Emphasizing his words, Tsukumo ended the call.

Could Adano have been caught? Youran thought that, but——

"Seems that they've received New Moon-sama's Okaa-sama."

"Eh?"

"My subordinates, Chan Suu and Chan Shaa are escorting her, and you'll be taken along later as well, New Moon sama. And then...guhuhuhu."

Tsukumo made a bizarre laugh. Hearing that, Youran felt chills race up her spine.

She wasn't sure why, but it was really disgusting.

"Guhuhu, gonna have some mother-daughter bowl, mother-daughter bowl."

"T-That's an act...That's just a character that you've set yourself as."

Youran was violently disturbed.

"That's right. I've set myself to be a person who loves the mother-daughter bowl. And during that time period, it's the best thing to me in my value system."

"Eh....."

"We're going to slowly change New Moon-sama's way of thinking. Just like the Chan mother and daughter."

He made a repulsive smile at her.

Youran completely felt her face become pale.

Chapter 130: I and Me / From the Cradle to the Grave

This was a two-fold crisis.

Youran as Director of the New Moon and Youran as a female were being targeted at the same time. If it were only one of the two, she could endure it, but if it came down to both of them, she definitely wasn't having it. This was a situation in which both the public and private versions of her; everything was liable to be stolen.

Youran was not the type of girl to sit and wait for death, and in this situation she had neither the experience nor the quarreling nature to remain calm. Dodging, she aimed for the door she had come through and broke out into a run.

The only thought occupying her mind was that she must run away.

"You're no fuuun"

Instantly, Saekusa Tsukumo's smile was right in front of her. His steps had revolved around her in a circle. Her shoulders shivered again. Though his face was in order, it looked to Youran's eyes like a disgusting smile.

"There are a lot of things that I want to discuss with and tell New Moon-sama, and there are also things I want to ask."

"I-I have nothing to do with this! I have nothing to talk with you about."

"Has New Moon-sama eaten parent-child bowl soba before? It's soba with chicken meat and egg-bound soup on top. It was being sold earlier at a major convenience store, but it's a commodity that disappears in a ridiculously short time."

"W-What are you....."

Tsukumo had suddenly spoke up, and his meaningless words further fanned Youran's fear.

"I really liked that. They were not placed on rice, but soba. Putting the parent-

child style in a field that's generally different; reminds me of an attractive mother and daughter dropped suddenly from happy everyday life into debt hell, presented to the yakuza."

"Prese——"

"And then, it disappeared from the storefront, so I thought to make it myself and had Chan Suu bake it, but as it was it had no art, and I thought to set things up on a shabby stage of an even newer element. You know, isn't there the type of person who shines when they're being tormented? So not rice or even noodles; I thought to put them on bread. So what do you think happened afterwards? That's right; it became a sandwich, and when I coated it with ketchup and margarine and put it on top of the roasted bread it was super delicious. Incidentally, is New Moon-sama still a virgin?"

"W-Why are you asking that question?"

"See, I can emit the white part, but I was thinking of having New Moon-sama emit the red part. Ah, well, maybe I'll have New Moon-sama's okaa-sama emit the white part. It wouldn't be half bad to scatter New Moon-sama's virginity after she becomes able to lactate."

"——"

She cowered, feeling madness from the man in front of her. Whether that was an act or his true nature was no longer clear. Not only his words, but his pupils were gradually gathering madness and replacing the once-rational person. He had pupils that could not be anything other than that of a madman.

"——っ"

Swinging her right arm, she released a backhand. Her wrist was grabbed, and this time she brandished her left hand. But that was grabbed too. Youran was constricted like a vicegrip.

"Sorry New Moon-sama, I can't afford to be slapped right now. I decided to only be okay with getting slapped for breaking a substitute promise."

"Please let go——Let go."

"Yeah, using those words is also good, New Moon-sama. Gives me shivers. I wonder if New Moon-sama's okaa-sama speaks the same way."

"——You little"

Both her hands grabbed, Youran kicked her legs up. That just met Tsukumo's groin area from the front.

Tsukumo reeled in agony. Youran took that opportunity to fling her hands to free herself, dashing out from the room.

Moving along the windowless corridor, she ran into the staircase.

Descending one floor down, she sprinted along another long hallway.

"Haa, haa, haa....."

Her breath became heavier in the smallest amount of time. She desperately tried to escape, disheveling her long twintails.

Fifth floor corridor, staircase.

Fourth floor corridor, staircase.

Third floor corridor, staircase.

The spiral staircase that took up the whole building made not only invasion, but escape difficult as well.

"Kyaa!"

Suddenly, she stumbled and fell, the impact causing her to begin to slide along the floor.

The twintails became undone, spreading across her shoulders.

On all fours, she rose up, furtively looking behind.

Had not chased after her, he still hadn't.

"Gotta run away....."

A strained voice leaked out of her mouth.

That was no longer Director of the New Moon or Youran.

It was not the noble woman, nor was it the lighthearted girl.

It was like a guiltless girl being chased down by a masked man with a chainsaw.

Panicking, Youran had nothing on her mind but running. Desperately raising her body up, she again aimed for the staircase and began to run.

Second floor corridor, staircase.

Having escaped three stages and racing down in one go, she simply focused on running away.

Reaching the first floor, as if waiting for her, the thick shutter slowly rose.

For a moment, she felt she had seen a light there, and embraced hope.
Normally.....The hope that she would never have.
Even so, she dashed into it.
Like a lemming dashing off a cliff.

"New Moon Sama"
"——Ngh ! "

Startled, she quickly braked.
Somehow, Tsukumo had appeared beyond the entrance.
Not able to stop, she crashed into her opponent. She rebounded away and fell on her backside.
Tsukumo leisurely entered the building. The shutter went down, letting out an electrical "gigigi" sound.
The falling shutter, and the disappearing light.
She desperately tried to escape, crawling toward the entrance.

"Can't let you do thaaat"
"Kyaa!"

Her hair grabbed, her neck was jerked back.
During that time, the shutter completely closed.
Despair attacked Youran, and the bit of the outside she had seen——the difference between the hope seen and the despair tightened her heart.

"Let's go back. Okaa-sama's going to arrive soon, after all."

Tsukumo said, dragging Youran by her hair.
The path that she had desperately tried to reach was taken back, and hope became far.
Passing through the long corridors and coming out of the decorative elevator, he had her stand before the staircase.
Staircase.
To Youran now, that looked like a straight path to despair.
If they went all the way up here then they would not return again. That seemed like the sickle of hell opening its mouth widely.

".....Let go."

Youran softly opened her mouth. Tsukumo reacted to the voice that was

squeezed out of the bottom of her stomach.

"Oh, did you ready yourself, New Moon-sama?"

"Let go."

She said the same words with a different tone.

As if he were overpowered or had an opinion about that, Tsukumo released her hair that he had been grabbing.

Falling to the floor, Youran who had been dragged silently stood up.

Looking at the staircase, then the shutter, then at Tsukumo.

Roughened hair and a quiet gaze.

"I can't escape, huh"

"Nah, of course not. I have no intention of letting you."

"I see, I get it."

"Ohhh, so that means——"

"Indeed, I have readied myself. It seems that there is no point struggling any further."

She said, quietly closing her eyes.

Behind her eyelids, various scenery came and went.

Her life thus far, like a revolving lantern, flowed through there in a moment.

Lastly, the form of one boy floated.

Seeing that face lastly, Youran opened her eyes.

".....Give me my hairclip."

She said quietly, and Tsukumo picked it up handing it to her. She accepted it, slowly tying it back into pretty twintails like some sort of ritual.

"That hairstyle is also good, New Moon-sama, just like——"

It seemed that Tsukumo was saying something, but it didn't enter her ears. Her eardrums were picking up sound, but her mind did not recognize it.

Raising her hands, she fastened the twintails.

A smile rose; one of self-depreciation.

"New Moon-sama?"

As if realizing something at last, Tsukumo said with a puzzled voice.

Amongst the faintly opened teeth of the mouth, the tongue was softly added in.

If she would be humiliated like this, then she might as well——

"Just——"

Tsukumo frantically tried to halt. He aimed a cold smile at her.

(Once more.....I wonder if you wanted to be pulled tight.)

Thinking that in the heart, closing their eyes, and putting power into the jaw.

"You must not!"

"——ngh"

That moment, her voice dissolving her resolve sounded out. Not heeding any physical obstacles, the fairy had slipped past the wall and appeared.

"That's bad; you must not do that sort of thing!"

"You....."

"Taiyou-chan! They're here!"

Perplexed at the suddenly appearing fairy, she who had been able to stop Youran went in the direction of the day after next, letting out a loud voice.

Dogohhn!

The building violently shook, the next moment.

Through the floor where Youran and Tsukumo stood, concrete telephone poles had pierced through the wall like spears.

Chapter 131: Shovelers Unmatched / You Will Truly Adjust

To Natsuno Taiyou, Juunishima Youran was in a delicate position.

Taiyou, who was thinking of making seven brides and walking together through difficulties, had three brides and one candidate as of now.

The identical triplets had the unique attribute of acknowledging themselves as "one girl", therefore Hayakawa Kotone, Suzune, and Kazane had been oriented toward a harem life before meeting Taiyou.

Being an Eternal Little and spending her really long life of eighty years alone, Taiyou accepted her regardless of that, so Azumaya Kohaku decided to offer him her everything, beginning with her chastity.

Then there was Miki Aoba, born in a normal household of wives and children and lovers and raised lovingly by her three mothers.

These three had currently exchanged feelings with Taiyou and had all recognized themselves as his "brides".

There was one more: a girl currently stopped at the candidate level. The white beautiful swordswoman who exploited her title of the world's strongest to the fullest. Although her real name was unknown, Taiyou had fallen for Shirokiyami, repeatedly challenging the condition of "Bride Acquired by Winning a Fight".

Taiyou had clear feelings for these four.

Youran was not there. She was not counted as that type of existence in his consciousness.

But Youran was able to see the fairy by Taiyou's side. She could see the Level Fairy whose form was only visible to the humans who had kissed with him. They had gone as far as to kiss, and yet they did not have that relationship. She was that delicate existence to Taiyou.

Traversing the wall that was demolished by the thrown spear-like telephone poles, he took relaxed strides into the area that was closed off until a moment

ago. As if he were quite surprised, Tsukumo stood there dumbfounded. Standing in front of Youran, he checked her condition.

"You alright?"

"You...why are you here?"

"That conversation comes later-wait, there's blood coming out of your mouth!"

"Eh? Ohhh, I might have lost it a bit. Because I was just trying to bite off my tongue."

"What do you mean by "just"? Isn't that pretty major!?"

Taiyou's voice cracked. Youran looked placid, but this situation seemed to be actually quite dangerous.

"Whoaaa, that does look painful..."

"It is in fact painful. I bit my tongue so that's a given."

"I got it, so don't speak anymore. Just looking at you makes me feel like my mouth is hurting."

Tentatively leaving Youran be, he turned to Tsukumo. Right now there was something more important to him than Youran.

"So we meet again."

"Natsuno Taiyou..."

"Where's Aoba? Tell me."

He cornered him with a quiet yet forcible manner of speaking. It was evident that the one who had taken Aoba away was this man. To Taiyou, Aoba was who really mattered.

"That was an accident."

Coming back to reality, Tsukumo spoke with a grave face.

"I didn't mean to do that. Miki Aoba and Akita Mio. I knew that they were mother and daughter, and I didn't have the slightest intention of harming them. I'm the one responsible for Akita Mio suffering wounds."

".....I'm asking about Aoba."

"I did try to capture Akita Mio along the way, and thought about abducting the remaining two. Three mothers and their beloved daughter; I thought that I'd surely get to enjoy an unprecedented level of mother-daughter bowl. Oh yeah,

do you know about the mother-child bowl composed only of chicken meat?"

"I don't have time to tag along with your nonsense. I'm asking you where Aoba is."

From their exchange on the ferry, Taiyou knew that he mustn't be lured into his pace. Putting aside the three-mother mother-daughter bowl, he was a bit curious about the chicken meat-only parent-child bowl, but he reined his facial expression in, telling himself to not let even that behavior show.

"Taiyou-chan Taiyou-chan, how do you make a parent-child bowl with only chicken meat? I'm intrigued so I'm going to try and ask."

Ignoring the hurried Hera who couldn't read the air, he glared at Tsukumo.

"A chicken-meat-only parent-child bowl is——"

Tsukumo attempting to begin speaking without answering the question. His heart rapidly cooling, Taiyou struck a portion of the wall next to him that was still not smashed.

The thick wall made clattering noises as it crumbled.

This was not intimidation. Taiyou didn't have the presence of mind to do something as dreary as that.

He had become composed He lifted up a fragment of the crushed wall that had the surface area of a single bed, aiming at Tsukumo and hurling it.

"—— ! "

Changing his facial expression, Tsukumo desperately evaded. Taiyou picked up yet another fragment, hurling one after the other.

Taiyou had learned from the fight aboard the ferry.

Saekusa Tsukumo took bizarre steps, making unpredictable movements. Even if he upfront tried to bash him, Taiyou would definitely not have been able to catch him.

At the same time, looking from a remote area at those movements, they weren't exactly all that fast. It was needless to say that Shirokiyami could create twofold afterimages, and in this case he saw his movements as about as fast as the average adult male.

Therefore, he had thought of a surface attack of hurling things with huge surface areas like this.

Whether that was effective or not could be determined by observing Tsukumo desperately dodging with a frantic expression.

The fragments of wall soon reached depletion, but the wall itself was still there. Taiyou further hit the wall, proceeding to hurl what he demolished.

"Ohhh, impressive as always, Taiyou-chan."

"I'm at a loss for words. This has got to be rubbish."

"Youran-chan doesn't like this sort of thing?"

"No, it's effective so I think it's fine. I'm saying this because that man's been dodging in a strange manner since earlier."

"Was it that weird?"

"That's not Japanese martial arts. I think that it's a variety that emerged from some country's ritual dance. Which is why I think it looks weird."

"Right; Youran is also a Japanese person after all."

The exchange going on behind Taiyou didn't enter his ears. Tsukumo, who would usually look puzzledly at Taiyou seemingly talking to himself, did not have that leisure.

Taiyou devotedly hurled the bigger fragments with Tsukumo panicking and dodging in a desperate attempt to evade.

Taiyou hit the wall a third time.

"This is——"

There was an open space beyond the crushed wall, in which various tools were left discarded in disarray.

It seemed to be a form of storehouse, and Taiyou found something in there.

"Oh, is that a shovel?"

Hera came next to him, talking with a smile.

Taiyou cleared off the dust that had gathered on the shovel, lifting it up.

"This feels really nice in my hands."

That was a mere shovel. It was designed with wood with a triangular handle and an iron end; a shovel that you could find amongst the dirt-cheap overflowing shovels at your typical hardware store.

But Taiyou unintentionally muttered that, that it felt really nice in his hands.

"This reminds me of when I met Taiyou-chan."

"What do you mean?"

Youran came next to Hera as she said that, asking with a dubious expression.

"When I met Taiyou-chan he was digging a hole with this; digging holes and filling holes, and then Taiyou-chan's level rose and the harem became 65535."

"I don't really get it, but I guess it's an article of your guys' memories."

"Yeah...so that's why it feels nice, huh."

Taiyou tried swinging the shovel around. Spinning it round and round, his actions were reminiscent of that of a bojutsu master that would appear in movies and the like.

"That's amazing Taiyou-chan. You look like the world's best shoveler."

"I don't even know if you're complimenting me or disparaging me."

Taiyou laughed strainedly.

"Shoveler is a word of compliment."

"Is that right."

Hera spoke with a full smile. Returning that with a smile, Taiyou began coming closer to Tsukumo with the shovel.

For some reason, confidence welled up. Confidence with no grounding that if he at least had this, he could even fight with Tsukumo.

".....What do you plan to do with that?"

"If I do you in with this then on the news they might say[with a bar-like thing], or perhaps maybe they'd say[with a shovel-like thing]. What do you think?"

He said, contorting his mouth into a grin.

Taiyou, a fan of bluffing, did not miss his opponent's discomposure, soon taking advantage of it.

Until now that had ended with a simple bluff, but now it was different.

Whirr!

He swept horizontally with the shovel. Along with the booming sound of the air being torn apart, the shovel tore the wall apart.

As if it were cut by a sharp blade, a fresh wound emerged from the wall.

Vestiges that one would never associate with the doing of a shovel.

The essence of a bluff was falsity, and Taiyou's shovel was an intimidation with actual power.

"I'll ask once more. Where is Aoba?"

"....."

"Alright."

He approached Tsukumo.

"Whoa there. If you have something to ask then you can't just kill him."

"I know. I don't get my objectives and methods confused."

"Well then that's good."

Youran was satisfied. As long as her and Taiyou's thinking patterns resembled each other closely, he would back down with the slightest warning. If he intended to just not fess up, then they could just drop a finger or two. Doing so would probably make the other side feel like talking. Thinking that, Taiyou raised the shovel overhead.

Chapter 132: Shovelers Unmatched / The Fourth Pair

"Taiyou-chan!"

"——Ngh!"

Reacting to Hera's voice, he struck down the flying tool that had been headed for Youran. A bladed arrow and pole shuriken collided with the blade of the shovel, scattering sparks throughout the now-ruined multi-tenant building.

"So there was a reaction, although I didn't think it would even hit."

Tsukumo said, and two females showed themselves from behind him. One of them had glamorous proportions while wearing black attire with a hood that covered their face. The other one wore a mini archery hakama with an aqua theme, wearing high knee socks with ribbons attached to them.

The female ninja drew another shuriken, and the archer girl paired another arrow with her bow.

"Chiyo and Chie, I see. You've done well in coming."

Tsukumo gave words of appreciation to the girls without turning around.

"Obliged."

"Jeez! I even told you not to play around too much. It's because you don't listen to a gal's warning that these sorts of things happen."

The female ninja answered in a husky voice, and the archer girl spoke in a reproachful, high-pitched tone.

"I've currently set myself to be a guy who likes mother-daughter bowls, and there's the greatest mother-daughter bowl right in front of me. Are you telling me to die?"

"I'm telling you that there's a proper time and place for that. You can——"

"It's impossible!"

Youran felt goosebumps as Tsukumo cut in. She felt indescribably creeped out that he still insisted on saying these things even under the current

circumstances.

But that seemed to just be Youran, and as if the two females by Tsukumo's side were used to this, Chie was just a bit exasperated.

"I want to quit, I seriously want to quit. Wait, there's also a pair on this side, so do you want more or something?"

"Resignation."

Looking at the newly appeared women, Hera widened her eyes muttering.

"I see that a thick one has appeared."

Like you're one to talk, Taiyou thought swallowing his words. He re-grabbed the shovel and took a step forward.

Suddenly, as if triggered by that, flying implements bounded up again.

Shurikens curving an orbit from three directions, and bladed arrows flying in like a beam of light.

Kikikikiin! As expected, the flying tools were aiming for Youran instead of Taiyou, and he flung them down.

"Why are you targeting her? Wasn't your objective to capture her?"

"A woman's envy——"

"I already know that this sort of thing doesn't work on you."

"Feint."

Chiyo and Chie interrupted Tsukumo's words. Right after that, the black-clothed Chiyo darted out in front of Tsukumo, crouching poised in front of him to guard.

Taiyou cautioned himself in response to the immediate movement. Not as fast as Shirokiyami, but quite the speed.

That girl stared at Taiyou, speaking to Tsukumo behind her.

"Advice."

"Run, you say?"

"Like I'd let you!"

Making a decision on the spur of the moment, Taiyou brandished his shovel and began closing in.

Gakiiin!

Kunai and shovel collided, scattering sparks.

Numbness raced up Taiyou's hand. The glamorous kunoichi——The slender, big-breasted Chiyo had power that you couldn't tell from her appearance. But——

"When it comes to power, I'm higher!"

The moment they collided, Taiyou only had his shovel ricochet off, but Chiyo was sent flying, body and all. It was more than he expected, but he didn't think he would lose when it came to hitting his opponent, giving Taiyou confidence and allowing him to further jump in.

KIN! Kin! Kiiin!

Chiyo halted the shovel that Taiyou had swung with all his might, pushed back each time, and proceeded to retreat while covering Tsukumo.

"Mom! Kuh"

Chie moaned from behind. She had tried to fit arrows and provide cover fire, but for whatever reason, the arrowheads had been aimed at Taiyou for some time, not releasing.

"As expected of Youran-chan. I'm enthralled and truly aspire to your decision to not hesitate to use Taiyou-chan as a shield."

"Don't you think that I'd learn after getting assailed three times?"

He wasn't sure what it was, but he understood by hearing the exchange behind him. It would seem that Youran had moved so as to leave Taiyou in Chie's firing range.

"I'll push past like this."

"——Ngh!"

Taiyou raised his gear further.

The shovel that he had felt was so comfortable had become even more comfortable in his hands, and his attacks also became harsher. As evidence of that, Chiyo who had initially combated him from the front had begun to be pushed back more and more, not even being able to take attacks and instead barely dodging in the nick of time.

"Mom!"

As if she were panicking, Chie unleashed her arrows from the bow

successfully.

Hyun! Hyun! Hyun!

It could be understood with a glance that this was quite the technique, and she let out a third round after a short pause. The pointy tip that possessed bloodshed power aimed straight at the top of Taiyou's head, chest, and groin, flying at all his vital spots.

Taiyou loved bluffs. He purposefully blocked the arrows with his body.

Plunk, plunk plunk.

As if they were made of cotton, the moment the arrows hit Taiyou's body, they lost their power and fell to the ground.

For the arrows that aimed at the top of his head and the like, Taiyou stopped them with his eyeballs, and the bluff seemed to produce quite the effect, as Chie who had released the arrows became pale-faced.

"No way...I knew that they wouldn't work, but in this fashion..."

"Unusual."

The young Chie made a pale face at Taiyou's performance, whereas Chiyo whose hood covered everything but her eyes let out an even lower husky voice. Taiyou took a step even further as if confirming that he felt the same way.

"I've set myself to be the kind of guy who loves mother-daughter bowls."

"Huh?"

This time it was Taiyou's turn to be surprised.

A line that he had already heard countless times today alone, but he didn't think he would hear it here.

Taiyou pointed his eyes that had expressions of disbelief and apprehension of a yet-unknown person.

"What is it at a time like this?"

He remarked. That instant——

"——Ngh!"

Lightning ran horizontally before his eyes. Hurriedly kicking the ground and leaping back, he raised his shovel and guarded.

Spah! Was the sound that he felt transmit from within his body along his arm. Chiyo's slender arms passed by in front of his eyes and the kunai had severed

the shovel's blade from the side.

Not even enough time to be surprised, Tsukumo took something out and struck it against the ground.

That made sounds and ruptured, and white fumes made the place hazy. It was a smokescreen.

Taiyou immediately readied his shovel and retreated further, grabbing hold of Youran's arm. Along with a small scream of "kyaa", her body settled in his arms. He swung the sword around with a hum just like that. He swung it around tracklessly in front of his body for protection.

In the worst-case scenario ▪ ▪ ▪ this was the treatment for preventing follow-up attacks, but as expected, they did not come. When the smoke had cleared up, the Tsukumo faction could no longer be found anywhere in the demolished walls of the multi-tenant building.

"Not here, huh....."

"Jeez, what are you doing? To think that you'd fall for that. It was totally obvious that was a line to divert your attention."

".....I'm ashamed."

He wanted to say a lot of things back, but he thought it was as Youran said. There was no reason for Tsukumo to continue conversing at that point, and he finally understood that it was a clever scheme to divert his concentration. It was like he had lost to someone slapping their hands in front of his face, and he began to feel anything but refreshed.

"More importantly, are you alright? How's the inside of your mouth?"

"Mouth? Oh it's fine, because it only got cut a bit. Biting off one's tongue isn't that easy in the first place, and if my consciousness were to fade away any more then it'd be impossible anyhow."

"Just show me."

"Huh?"

"Come on."

Taiyou said, holding her jaw and lifting it up. He grabbed ahold of her cheek with the other open hand, opening her mouth.

"Yeah, this seems to be alright. Not even so much as cutting as it is a bad mouth ulcer."

"....."

"Let's head somewhere later where you can get treatment. Actually, you had some sort of family physician or whatnot, right?"

"....."

"What's wrong?"

"....."

Youran continued to be silent for some reason. Taiyou wondered why she had answered back earlier but not now, he looked at her reddening face and finally realized what he was doing.

Gazing at each other from close proximity...No, even before that, the act of grabbing her jaw and lifting it up in and of itself • • could not look like anything else.

The action taken prior to kissing. No matter where one looked from any direction, it looked like nothing but that.

Suddenly, the scenery, the sensation of that day was revived in Taiyou's mind. Kiss.

In Juunishima's research facility, being forced to kiss Youran by Kohaku. His heart beat fast, and now——.

"——Mmf!"

The next moment, Youran caught her breath and thrust him away. It wasn't impressive power, but Taiyou staggered back.

The feeling of being rejected ran through his head.

He felt somewhat apologetic for trying to kiss her like that, but the shock of being rejected by her was even bigger.

(W-Well. We aren't like that after all.)

Taiyou made that excuse in his heart. That Youran was different than Kotone and the others, so this was to be expected.

Taiyou's gaze swam, and Youran held her cheeks with both hands, not meeting his eyes.

A brief air of awkwardness drifted between the two of them.

Youran was the first to snap out of it.

"Oh yeah, we can't be doing these sorts of things right now. Gotta chase after

them."

"Ah, if that's the case then don't worry."

"Huh?"

Youran lowered her fine-shaped eyebrows quizzically at Taiyou keeping his cool.

"What do you mean by "don't worry"?"

"Hera isn't here, right? They have her tracking them."

"Ah."

She surveyed the surroundings, noticing that there was no fairy there.

"I discussed this with her earlier. That if the opponent were to run and I couldn't seem to catch up, Hera would tail them. They can't discover her following them if they can't see her."

Taiyou said, grinning.

"By this point, I bet she's riding on that guy Tsukumo's shoulders and crooning."

Imagining that sight, Youran burst into laughter with a "pffft".

Chapter 133: Shovelers Unmatched / For Some Reason I Want to Pull Them Tight

"I'll see you off."

"Huh?"

"I don't have anything I can do until Hera contacts me, so during that time I'll see you off to your house."

"You're fine with not waiting here? Oh, have you decided on a meeting place or something?"

Youran asked a reasonable question. Taiyou smiled and answered.

"No matter where I am, she catches up to me with teleportation. I've confirmed that she can return in an instant from a hundred kilometers distance in a straight line. "

"Whoa, that's pretty amazing."

"I think that your lack of caring is more amazing. Normally I think you'd be a bit shocked or grumble..."

"This is after I saw that unexplainable creature, so there's no way I'd be surprised about something like that."

"Makes sense."

It made sense, but many of times, the creatures known as females didn't quite make sense, Taiyou thought.

"You're a fine woman."

"Wha-"

Youran became speechless, making a face that questioned what he suddenly said.

"Ah no, I'm just saying that people like you are my type."

"Th——"

Taiyou suddenly began thinking. That come to think of it, lately there had been those types of women increasing around him. Discerning logic, these rational women had begun to increase.

Kohaku and Youran had been conspicuous among them, and the Kotone three sisters as well as Aoba were also a similar type. Pochi, who he had met just recently and might enter his family, was close to that as well.

Taiyou himself was that type of person, and he thought that those types of people were easier to hang out with on a regular basis.

So far as women who were completely the opposite, letting their feelings take priority, he could think of no one other than Mio.

Even in that sense, Taiyou truly thought he had been blessed as of late.

"Now then, where should we.....Huh, is something wrong?"

"It-It's nothing."

Youran for whatever reason reddened her face, averting her eyes.

Taiyou questioned what exactly had happened.

"L-Let's go. I'll say this for your benefit, but I'm also in a difficult situation, so prepare yourself if you want to escort me."

Youran said, breaking into a brisk walk. Taiyou followed after her, and the two of them exited the multi-tenant building that he had forcefully opened.

"Then again.....Where exactly should we head to?"

"....."

While tagging along with Youran who was muttering to herself, he stared fixedly behind her.

Youran's taut, straightened spine, and the two wavering ponytails.

Looking at those things, a bizarre emotion rose in Taiyou's chest.

"Hey, do you have a cell——Hyan!"

Outstretching his hands, he pulled her twintails toward himself.

"Hey!"

"Ah, sorry."

Taiyou hurriedly apologized.

For some reason, when he saw those things of hers he wanted to pull them tight.

It was the same when they met before, and it was the same now from reuniting after coming to this island.

The academy that he was attending had quite a few girls with twintails, and Taiyou had never held those sentiments toward them even once.

For some reason he just wanted to only pull on Youran.

"....."

Youran halted, clutching at the base of her twintails while glaring at Taiyou with a sulky face. Taiyou braced himself for getting slapped for his ill-timed prank.

(Huh?)

But Youran said nothing further, turning her heels and resuming her walk. The slap he had awaited hadn't flew at him, and the complaints that he expected to be there were nowhere to be found.

If anything, the moment she had turned around, Youran was making a facial expression as if she hadn't seen Taiyou before.

What in the world was this——When Taiyou, interested in her expression, came to, he once again pulled——this time, her twintail on the opposite end.

Once again, with a start, Youran averted her neck.

"Come on! Give it a rest! Why do you always always pull on my twintails!"

"Uhh...I felt like it?"

"You say you felt like it?"

"I'm really sorry. For some reason when I look at your twintails I just end up wanting to pull them."

"What kind of reason is that?"

"I'm truly sorry. I won't do it anymore, so I'm begging you."

Taiyou bowed with his hands together. In that position, he shot an upward glance to check, and perhaps because of him meekly lowering his head, Youran's expression wasn't all that angry.

Relieved, he raised his head.

"Do you do this to other girls too or what?"

"Eh, no I don't, but....."

"So you haven't? ...Just to me?"

"Oof....."

It was a tough question to answer.

The only one he did that too was Youran, but there was no way he could say something to her like "I'm only doing this prank to you".

It was the sort of answer that if done clumsily would give him a "I hate you". He didn't want to get that, so he had hesitated on how to answer.

"Well?"

"Uhh....."

Taiyou faltered in response to the interrogating Youran.

She was making the kind of face that said "You'd better answer, and I won't allow any dodging the question".

Taiyou thought it was reasonable for the girl who he had fooled around with time and time again to press him for answers.

While he was wavering about how to answer that...

".....What're y'all flirtin' about?"

A Kansai dialect could be heard from the side. Turning around, there was a blonde hair blue eyed beauty standing there who was the epitome of a foreigner.

Inside the black-coated limousine, though it was spacious, on the other hand, Taiyou felt uncomfortable. Knees joined and his hands resting on them, it was the kind of reaction that a fan would have meeting a big-time celebrity.

The reason was the two girls sitting in the opposite seats. Moreso it was the fault of the blonde beauty sitting beside Youran.

"Uhh...so I didn't really get that just now."

"I said m'name's Leticia H Keraaz. The third princess o' the Phili Kingdom."

"Kingdom? Princess?"

"By the way, this person's a state guest here, so if you screw up then it'll be that much of an international affair."

"Whaaat ? "

"Well it's probably already too late. This guy bringing that thing in here is already an out."

Youran was talking about the shovel left on the car mat next to Taiyou. The blade was split in the middle and had lost most of its function as a shovel, but Taiyou had brought that in.

It was an important shovel that had helped him to recognize shovels anew; something that he couldn't quite bring himself to discard.

But, he thought it was just as Youran had said.

It was nothing but rude to drag in an old, destroyed shovel into the state guest, Princess Leticia's car.

"S'cool, it's important innit?"

"Uh, uhh, well..."

"Sure it is, I could tell by looking at yer hand movements. The manner ya used yer hands in carrying it was the manner of treating a naked girl delicately.

"Why are you acting like you'd know, despite being a true virgin?"

"True, I'm still a virgin. This still remains 'n all."

Leticia said, brushing her golden shining long hair up and revealing the nape of her neck.

Taiyou felt his heart beat as he looked at the white nape, and shortly after, he had found the thing that she doubtless wanted to show him.

The back of her neck had a small, rainbow-colored mark. It was a birthmark that was clearly an unnatural color.

Seeing that, thirst for knowledge exceeded sexual excitement.

"What exactly is that?"

Taiyou inquired politely, being that the person he was speaking to was a princess.

"Maiden Pearl, one o' the secrets transmitted amongst the royal family. They put a sorta rough chemical here and attach it. With this a clean body and rainbow color remain, but if it was a male's thing, then that moment it would disappear in a flash."

"There's really something like that?"

"I dunno much either. But the royal family has a custom of entering this into them from the time they were born. Big Sis 's disappeared on the day after her first night."

"Wow....."

"Well, normally ye'd needa show 'em since it's the proof of being a maiden. The color's gross so I just hide it likeso."

Leticia said, letting her hair down again and hiding the rainbow mark.

"You...really are a princess, eh."

"That's not really what ya see, is it? Well, me and 'em are the same race." Leticia said, putting her arms around Youran's shoulders. Youran made a slight disgusted face but did not display any signs of rejection.

"Even this girl doesn't look like New Moon Director in moments like these."

"Ahh, that's right."

Taiyou nodded, looking between Youran and Leticia. He agreed with Leticia's words, though only with the first half.

Youran and Leticia. He could smell the same scent from both of them.

"You also have a good posture."

"Posture?"

"I mean your spine. This person's a maniac behind the scenes anyhow."

"Whoa, that's another queer hobby ya got there."

"No no, please don't believe that. It's not that, it's your——"

"Come to think of it"

Youran cut in as Taiyou began speaking.

"So why did you come here?"

Going so far as to slice the flow of events with her voice, Leticia stared grinningly at Youran with a know-it-all look.

Chapter 134: Shovelers Unmatched / From Within the Flames

"So ya ain't satisfied with your close friend comin' to save ya?"

"That's not what I mean. I'm not asking the reason; I'm asking how this began."

"Ah....."

Taiyou tensed up at Youran's serious expression. He immediately grasped what kind of conversation it was.

"What, ya too lovestruck to realize?"

"Eh ? "

But he couldn't understand Leticia's words. Youran was lovestruck? He tilted his head down.

"Just answer the question."

"Right. 'Though it ain't anythin' special. There was just somethin' I forgot to tell ya and when I called ya once more it didn't go through."

"So that's why....."

"That's why? Huh, could you at least explain that?"

Taiyou cut in. For whatever reason, he always ended up using polite language when talking to Leticia.

She came off as easygoing with her Kansai dialect, but her fantasy-like blonde hair and blue eyes reminded him of a princess's appearance, which made him do that.

"Yer a commoner."

"Eh? Well, I suppose I am."

Taiyou made a face as if to ask "And what of it?"

"Here, that, could ya gimme it?"

"Yeah."

Youran nodded, taking out her own cell phone.

"This here just looks like a cell, yeah? Can't be helped since it looks like a

simple cell, but it uses all imaginable techniques and can transmit anywhere on the globe. Whether it be the cavern of a snowy mountain or the deep part of the sea where no light reaches, it's made to transmit through all of that. Well, as long as the main body doesn't break. Hmm, I wonder if it would've been able to even transmit to and from space if conditions were met."

She sought confirmation from Youran, who gave a small nod.

"And so for disaster strikin' and the like, the batteries also are set with every method out there to be replenished and last longer."

"That's amazing. I didn't know they made those sorts of cells."

"They had 'em made. One-of-a-kind custom-made."

"Oh, come to think of it, there wasn't any maker's logo on it at all."

"Right. By the way, I have somethin' similar, though it 'as some unnecessary functions."

Leticia said, waving her own cell phone in front of him.

"These sorts of things 'r necessary, fer us. We're humans of that sorta world. We're really connected by a hotline, me and 'er."

"Hotline?"

"The usual meaning, yeah."

Youran said, supplementing. He couldn't initially understand what the usual meaning was.

However, he did understand one thing.

"So it's unthinkable that your lines wouldn't connect."

""That's right ! "" Welp, although I didn't realize 'till it was too late 'n then when I dashed over here it was all over."

Leticia shrugged her shoulders in the exaggerated mannerism of a westerner. While looking at that, Taiyou developed another question.

"So things would progress as expected. But then why did you ask that?"

Taiyou threw the question point-blank at Youran. If such a thing was really to be expected, then Youran should understand it without having to ask.

"Well now, I wonder whyyy"

Youran didn't answer. Leticia instead made a phrase that sounded as if she were playing dumb, putting a mischievous smile on her face. Youran gave her a stern glare; they seemed to have made a meaningful exchange. But even that was just for an instant. When that was over, Leticia erased her smile, gazing at Youran with an earnest face as she spoke.

"But still, this is your home ground innit? Things that don't normally occur shouldn't occur...What 'appened?"

".....Michiyo."

It was a simple word, and Leticia made an expression as if comprehending everything.

"Hah, "a snake in one's bosom" I see. Always the woman to experience things in style."

"Michiyo ? "

Taiyou asked puzzledly, hearing that name for the first time.

"This gal's subordinate, and until yesterday she was the retainer held in high regards."

"So by "a snake in one's bosom"...did she seriously betray her?"

"Right. Otherwise I wouldn'ta said all that. Gave one human too much jurisdiction."

"....."

"Welp, ain't nothin' helped now."

Youran kept her mouth shut as Leticia spoke exasperatingly.

It was becoming a rather long-winded conversation, but he was able to somewhat grasp the situation.

He glanced out the car window. Hera showed no signs of returning. Taiyou decided to dig a bit deeper into this conversation.

"So what now? I meant to take you back to your former location, but if that's the case then it might not be a good idea."

"Yer right. Hey."

Leticia called out to the sectioned off driver's seat. A speaker near the ceiling answered her in the form of a low male voice.

"Change of destination. Let's go ahead and go to the guest house——"
If Youran's place was no good, then Leticia vouched for hers——

Thud! An explosion swayed the car. The black-coated limousine that had been treading on the public road spun around in inertia.

"Shishido!"

As if answering her scream, the minute that the car stopped revolving, it took off in a flash. The tranquil driving from earlier had shifted to rough driving. It was a raging speed that lightly exceeded the speed limit of the public road. It was a speed fast enough to beat even the incessant explosive sounds. He looked through the rear window to see what was going on. He could see dense explosive flames rising up from beyond the glass.

"What in tarnation!"

"Seems like our pursuers are here."

"What! This car's a diplomatic number. Are they seriously tryin' to take the car and all while we're ridin'?"

".....Thinking about it, that way might be more convenient. Aiming only for me would make their objective too clear, but if you also became a sacrifice then their intentions would become vague."

"Yer way too cheerful 'bout this!"

Leticia clicked her tongue. The two girls were having the conversation while holding onto the grip above the window.

Taiyou gave a wry smile at that. He didn't really want to ask, but it was just so odd for these two girls to be so valorous as to not let out a single scream even in this situation.

"This car's armor?"

"Nothing but the minimum bulletproof. We get it full-on and that's it!"

"How about weaponry?"

"Is that what you equip when going to a close friend's house to play?"

"Do it from now on!"

"A'ight, I'll load it with nuclear stuff!"

Shortly after the two girls had spoken frivorously...
Thud thuuud, the grand explosion noises tore through the eardrum. Top and

bottom became disoriented for just an instant, and the interior • • the entire car revolved sideways.

The girls made tense faces, but still did not scream.

The car wasn't moving. Looking at the driver's seat, the driver had limply lost consciousness.

Youran and Leticia put their hands on the left and right doors, pulling the levers and trying to escape, but either door was squashed and wouldn't open.

Explosive sounds could be heard from far away. Looking further, new rocket ammunition was flying toward the car.

".....I at least wanted time to think of a farewell poem."

"I win. I just had m' will updated."

The two girls joked with each other. It was in such a lighthearted manner so he wondered if there were some way to achieve that, but looking closely, they both had faces of resignation.

The gallant faces unique to humans who had accepted death.

Taiyou shivered.

These girls were too sportsmanlike. At a time like this, immediately readying themselves.

That resignation was scary, fearful.

He wanted to smash through that.

"Leave it to me."

He said quietly to the two, whispering.

He said with even stronger resignation than them, surprising them.

"I'll do something about it."

He gripped the shovel, ignoring the perplexed and puzzled girls. He stabbed the half-blade shovel through the ceiling.

Zugagagaga!

"Uwoooooh!"

The next moment, Taiyou put all his might into rotating the shovel.

The car was split into two from the inside. With Taiyou in the center, the hull had been parted in tears from front to back.

Leticia's eyes widened at the scene that occurred before her. Not heeding her,

Taiyou pushed the split back end of the car and went in the opposite direction. Rocket ammunition flew over at the half-car body and bumped into it—exploding.

"H-Hey!"

"No, he's fine."

"Whaddya mean, not with that kinda—"

"He's fine."

Youran stopped her friend, her face filled with confidence. She knew about Taiyou • • . Still dissatisfied and speechless at the calm Youran, Leticia once again lost her words in another sense the next moment.

It was the appearance of Taiyou in the flames, appearing composed, that caught her off guard.

Chapter 135: Shovelers Unmatched / Maskless but Driver

"He'll be fine even in that."

"Seems that way."

Emerging from the flames, Taiyou dusted off his hems, answering Youran's words. Without any ash to be wiped off, it was more of a casual action.

"You've already somewhat quit being a human, haven't you? Coming out of the flames and all that."

"When all's said and done, I suppose I'd be a phoenix?"

Taiyou said with a silly face, but Youran didn't bite. She wasn't the type to like these sorts of banter.

"Honestly, its performance is too sharp and is difficult to handle."

"But in the right hands it has a lot of value. They say that rather than assembling the almighty, it's better to dispatch the right people in the right places."

"You do seem like you'd like that."

"My subordinates are all people who are hard to deal with after all."

Youran laughed depreciatively.

While Taiyou who had returned from the flames was exchanging that sort of conversation with Youran, Leticia widened her eyes at the sight.

Taiyou noticed that, thinking "come to think of it that's the natural reaction", secretly giving a bitter smile.

"What's wrong?"

"A-Are ya...the Terminator or somethin'?"

"I have thought that if I had that refined voice then life would be good."

"....."

Leticia was speechless. The blonde haired blue eyed girl looked strange, not bothering to close her opened mouth. Just a moment ago she had the awe-inspiring expression of one prepared for death, and Taiyou found that gap to be so weird.

"There's another one coming."

"Move."

He severed the remaining half of the car into half again, lifting it up. He aimed it at the pursuing rockets flying in and threw it. This time an explosion occurred at a location separated from the three of them, ending with a bomb blast enough to disturb their hair.

"This is absurd."

"And what will we do from here on?"

"Let's keep using these."

Taiyou said, lightly tapping the remaining one-fourth of the car frame that contained only the front wheels and driver's seat.

"What'll you do with that?"

"I'm going to do what I did before once more. Go ahead and ride."

"You mean inside?"

"Yeah."

"Ride in this condition...?"

"Well I'm riding."

Just like she said, Youran preceded and got in the passenger seat. Having only two tires, the car leaned backward, but she still managed to somehow get in.

"See, you come quickly too."

".....Can I believe ya?"

"You don't believe your close friend?"

"Yer unfair..."

Leticia gave a light sigh, following Youran into the passenger seat. And with Taiyou's instructions, the solid doors were closed, and glances questioning what to do next came from beyond the glass.

Youran was the same. She did believe in him, but her eyes showed interest in what he would do.

Taiyou grinned, picking up the car body that had been tilting.

It was a hunk of metal remains, but to rephrase, there were still tires on both sides, and it was a wheeled vehicle that had stopped working as a machine.

Taiyou knew something it resembled very well. He had once used it and it closely resembled something he had used to drive with his brides.

Trailer.

The only difference was that at that time, he had pulled it, but this time he would instead push it.

"Uwooooooh!"

Letting out a war cry, Taiyou pushed the car body, kicking the ground with all his might. It was inconvenient having no handle, but it wasn't a big problem to Taiyou as of now.

The pushed car began to move, running along the public road.

"Hey, am I dreamin'?"

"Unfortunately, it's reality. Because he really is like that."

".....This is the point where ya'd be surprised, typically."

"I'd be surprised if a baby suddenly grew wings and flew, but after something like that, seeing a baby skip crawling and start walking, I might say "That's impressive" and that would be it."

"But yer talkin' 'bout a baby coming up in the earth. Ya sure this guy ain't the son of some great devil king?"

While the two girls were conversing about that, Taiyou thought to himself as he pushed the car.

His skill, long distance nullification, could apparently nullify the explosion fumes caused by the rocket ammunition. He was able to confirm that upon pushing the back part of the car into the rocket ammunition earlier. Also, when he had thrown the one-fourth portion of the car and caused shock waves, his ability had gone into effect, and though it had blown into him, not a single hair on his head or cloth of his cuff had yielded.

But, as expected, it did affect other humans. He had certainly seen Youran's twintails and Leticia's blonde hair yielding to the shock wave.

"If it's a handgun then I can stop it, but bombs are no good."

He muttered while pushing the car.

If he was on his own then neither of them would be an issue, but right now he

had to protect the two girls.

If it was a handgun that fired in a line then he could just move in front of the fire, but if it was an explosion that caused a shock wave face then he could not perfectly defend against it. It came down to either largely avoiding such a situation or shooting it down from a remote location and making it explode. With that as a precondition, he set to imprint ideas into his consciousness regarding their next actions.

"Hey hey, who exactly are ya?"

Leticia suddenly asked.

"A gamer and high school student. That's it."

Taiyou played dumb. The extent in which someone could accept Hera's appearance after genuinely seeing her was different for Leticia, who couldn't see/wasn't seeing her, so he felt it was best to play dumb.

"In what world is there a high school student like that?"

"According to a certain person, it's only one in a hundred million."

He recalled what Hera had said to him when they met. The conversation at the time was weird, and a smile appeared on his mouth.

"And, are you still doing that training?"

"Training?"

"Wearing a jacket, discarding it, picking it up and wearing it again. That training."

"What are you, Jackie-Chan!?"

"Or opening and closing windows."

"Wasn't it wiping them!?"

"There was that time, yeah."

Taiyou smiled, remembering Youran's words that night. Right before they infiltrated the facility, what he did in order to raise his level even if slightly. Take off the jacket, then put it on. Open the window, then close it. Both of those actions were meaningless to regular humans, but for Taiyou they were actions to raise his power experience points.

And it also had another meaning.

At that point in time it didn't have any kind of meaning, but as of now it was different.

——Memories.

Memories with Youran. Memories existing between the two of them and only with them.

"....."
"....."

Silence fell over the mobilizing half-broken limousine.

Their eyes met each other, gazing.

Taiyou had something he wanted to ask her, something he wanted to say.

That was the next objective for coming to this····island, but as of this moment, the order of precedence had been swapped.

His eyes were no longer looking at anything but her.

And Youran as well——

"Two and one is two——Two and two is four——Two and three is six——"

All of a sudden, Leticia began reciting the multiplication table.

It was so abrupt and cryptic.

But on the contrary that was a good thing. Taiyou and Youran quickly snapped out of it, and the atmosphere that was developing between the two of them flew off at once.

"W-What are you saying all of a sudden?"

"Huh? It ain't nothing. I'd just been skipping out on my studies so I'm reviewing, is all. Three and one is——"

She said, then beginning the three's.

It was certainly something, and it was clear that she was insinuating.

But Taiyou as well as Youran couldn't say anything. After all, they had created that atmosphere without discerning the situation.

"Huh? Ya ain't gonna reflect on what ya did?"

"I will not! And there wasn't even anything to reflect on in the first place!"

"Welp, go 'head and do it slowly later. I'm Japanese, but even I can read the

air."

"——Ngh ! "

Youran's face turned red, letting out an inaudible groan. She wanted to retort but understood that no matter what she said it would be digging her own grave, so she couldn't say anything.

Taiyou was the same.

Averting his eyes from Leticia who had started to relax, continuing to push the car silently.

The presence of those behind them gradually got further away, and he thought they would be able to completely throw them off at this rate.

"Stop!"

"——Ngh ! "

Reacting to Youran's yell, Taiyou grabbed the car body that he was pushing, stomping his feet into the ground and putting on the brakes. The soles of his shoes had been worn down by the great force, but he somehow managed to stop it.

He didn't even need to ask what was wrong. Raising his head, he soon understood the reason for Youran's yell.

Ahead of the road, a helicopter was flying.

"That's an armed helicopter, isn't it?"

"Jeez, it just never ends."

"Hey, this is your fault, you know? Because if you hadn't come then you wouldn't have had your life targeted."

"Is that the way you talk to a close friend who came to save you?"

"Hey you, dump this girl in that cesspool over there. That way this attack will cease."

"If anythin' you should leave this girl here. If they capture her alone then that'll be enough to save the two of us."

"No no, come on everyone..."

Taiyou made a strained laugh.

"So what'll we do?"

"Nothing but observing their approach o'course. There are even people getting

off like SWAT or something."

Just as Leticia had said, men in special corps outfits were using the rope one by one descending the helicopter.

"True...Maybe we should get out of the car."

"Right."

The two of them said, opening the door and getting out of the car. Taiyou stepped forward so as to protect said girls.

Taiyou firmly gripped the shovel, and a reliable sensation transmitted.

He felt that as long as he had this, he could do anything.

Right when he was starting to think of possibly even launching a preemptive strike...

"It's a visit from Maid-chan."

"Michiyo....."

He could hear the voices of the two girls from behind. Unlike the lighthearted banter from earlier, these were tones with weight to them. As he looked, he certainly did see one maid disembarking from the helicopter.

Chapter 136: Shovelers Unmatched / Three Nets

The woman dressed as a maid had made a unique appearance, accompanied by the special unit men. It was such a surreal sight, and Taiyou found himself feeling exhausted.

But that was just him, whereas Youran made a grim face and Leticia's eyes grew cold.

The two girls were on guard. Affected by their demeanor, Taiyou pulled himself together and stepped forward in front of them to cover.

Protected by the men, Michiyo slowly drew closer, stopping when she was within conversational distance.

"It has been a while...Or at least that's what I would say if that much time had passed."

The tone of Youran's voice changed. To Taiyou, this was a very irregular way of speaking: the persona of "New Moon Director"

What kind of a face was she making right now...He was curious, but he resisted the urge to look back.

Now was the time to concentrate on the enemy in front of him.

Said enemy—Michiyo with her maid outfit, answered with a mysterious face.

"Yes, it already feels like something of the far past. To the point where everything feels nostalgic."

"Are ya in the position to be feeling sentimental? Ya even tried to lay hands on me."

"Even if I were on the road to Hades, I do not think that I would feel lonely if I were with you. If I were with my dear friend."

"Well ain't you nice. My tears are just fallin' down."

Leticia said with a wide smile. Someone not knowing the circumstances may have been different, but having saved her just earlier, Taiyou heard it as a statement of the utmost irony.

"My considerate nature was taught to me by my former superior."

"Well ain't that a good superior. Wonder why they . . . became "former"?"

"Disagreement between our personalities."

"I'd be more convinced if your musicianship was different."

"That person was very tone-deaf and was not at the level to where they could discuss musicianship."

"Come to think of it, that's how it was."

"Let me hear just one thing."

While Leticia and Michiyo were conversing with verbal irony, Youran who had been silently listening opened her mouth.

"What might that be?"

"Have you sold me out, or have you betrayed me?"

"Huh?"

Taiyou was the one who had let out a puzzled voice. Leticia's words had been clear irony so they were easy to understand.

But he couldn't understand what Youran was saying.

Sold out, and betrayed.

He couldn't understand what differences were between the two. The words themselves, and the intention contained in them.

"I will kiss your casket."

Michiyo's answer to that was also something incomprehensible.

"So that's your answer."

".....Indeed."

"Alright."

He sensed the slightest stirring behind him, and since then Youran had become silent.

Taiyou could not comprehend the intent of that exchange, but he got two things out of it.

One was the fact that Youran was satisfied with the answer to her question. Even if Taiyou couldn't understand, the intention had clearly transmitted between the two of them.

And one more. The fact that the two of them had decisively broken apart.

That was clear from the air.

Then the first move would win. Taiyou readied the shovel and leaped out.
(Do in the head.)

In a straight line, he proceeded to bound forward toward Michiyo, protected by the men.

With their current numbers they were at an overwhelming disadvantage. There was the possibility that fighting while protecting Youran and Leticia would push him into a corner and make the situation worse and worse. So he had thought to settle things in one go so that it didn't happen.

"Do it."

With Michiyo's order, the men simultaneously dispersed. With Michiyo left in the middle, they made a semicircle formation surrounding Taiyou.

"That's crane wing formation."

"The sensible way to win with numbers."

Ignoring the voice from behind, Taiyou cut in regardless.
Whatever formation that might be, as long as he held down Michiyo things would work out.
Suddenly, the men had simultaneously tossed something at the lunging Taiyou.

"Nets ! "

The words reached the edge of his mouth. Absorbed by the night sky and difficult to see, those things were the sorts of nets used for fishing.
But these were no ordinary nets. Sharp blades were attached to the knots, reflecting the sparkling moonlight.
These were things made to tangle and then tear apart the captured.
The scattered nets approached Taiyou. Unlike bullets or bombs, these were things that he could not render ineffective.
Also, there was not enough time to slip through and reach Michiyo.
Until now he would briefly retreat, taking his distance and starting over, but.

"Something like this!"

A flash of fighting spirit. Ready the shovel up high, he swung it down at once. The half-blade edge tore up the nets, blade and all.

"Wha-"

Right after feeling the reaction, Taiyou was perplexed. He felt something entwining right after splitting the nets into two. The sensation of meat being bitten into. He understood upon seeing the stitch appearing on his skin. It was an invisible net made with a thread that could not be seen, twining around his body. The first net was a decoy, and the real deal was the second invisible one.

"Right now, capture him like this."

With Michiyo's order, the men with the transparent nets began to whirl around. Accompanying that was the further entangling of the net, constricting his body.

"Some...thing like this!"

Feeling around, he thrust his hands onto the invisible stitch, trying to rip it off from side to side. It was made unexpectedly sturdy and at first didn't move an inch, but when he put power into it to the point where his temple bulged blue and he could hear it vibrating. Dragging along the shredded net, he aimed at Michiyo once again and lunged for her.

"Next."

Showing no signs of movement, Michiyo gave another order. The third net appeared, seeking to twine around Taiyou. Different than the second transparent net, and also a bit different from the first one. It was a net that could be seen clearly even in the night sky; a gleaming black luster of material. There were no blades attached. Then at this rate he could break through and rip——

"That ain't no good!"

"——Ngh!"

The panicked voice of Leticia came from behind. Taiyou instantly reacted. He threw the shovel with all his might at the already-

approaching net in front of him, immediately kicking the ground and leaping back.

Taiyou's full strength; an attack enough to pierce through even concrete walls like tofu. But the net only stretched a bit...it was not pierced through.

The faltering shovel clattered on the ground as it fell. Taiyou was perplexed as he watched.

"Just what is that net?"

"It's a net woven with human hair."

"Human hair...like hair on the head, huh."

"Right."

"With something like that..."

"We did not use mere hair, I'll have you know. This is the highest quality product woven from the hair of 49 virgins. That strength far surpasses that of carbon fiber."

Michiyo answered with a somewhat boastful voice.

"Something like that....."

"49 people? Yet another set of odd numbers."

"This is Juunishima. If it were on the mainland, they would have numbered around 108 people."

As usual, he heard an abstruse conversation behind him, but there was no time to be concerned about that.

Because Michiyo's subordinate men were getting closer, nets readied.

Taiyou aimed at the men in the corner. He thought to defeat the people holding the nets if the nets themselves were sturdy, but the men changed positions according to Taiyou's movements, bringing the nets to where he was.

Quickly slamming on the brakes, this time he headed for the opposite side. But as expected, the men re-threw the nets in a well-practiced encirclement formation.

Once again pressing the brakes, this time he took his distance from the men... from the nets.

"....."

Squatting, he silently ran through his thoughts.

A net that was said to have been woven using the hair of 49 virgins, holding power even stronger than carbon fiber.

Judging from the way Michiyo said it, perhaps in there was a charm...the sort of meaning that screwing up would mean an incantation.

That level of an item was actually defending against Taiyou's attacks like it was nothing.

But, was that really something that couldn't be torn?

Taiyou hesitated whether to test it or not.

The majority of his strength was superior power. In the case of that not working, it would entail nothing else working either...that state of thinking could very well occur.

If that were to happen then everything would be destroyed, and he had no choice but to break through with brute force to ensure that didn't happen.

He was of the opinion that even if he were overdoing it, he should do it.

On the other hand, he also thought like this.

Conquering the net and breaking through it was nothing but a method.

Ultimately his objective was to protect Youran or have her get away completely.

It wasn't any good if he mistakenly challenged the net and failed.

"What ya worried about?"

He could hear Leticia's voice from behind.

"That is——"

"Why don't ya just use this thing?"

"Eh?"

Wondering what she wanted him to use, he turned back, and Leticia was hitting the remaining one-fourth of the car frame.

He didn't initially understand, but he understood everything when he saw Youran lowering the beaten-up driver from the driver's seat to the side.

"I get it!"

Rushing up to the side of the car body, the two girls opened up a path. Taiyou lifted up the now-unmanned metal cluster, heading toward the men who were surrounding them.

"Uwoh...Ryaaaah!"

Taiyou aimed at the men——throwing the net at them.

A gigantic ball ran into the goal net.

The net could not be cut. Lacking speed or sharpness, the car frame was unable to cut the net.

That gigantic mass dragged along the men with the nets all together.

Chapter 137: Shovelers Unmatched / Tactically Unmatched

The men were being dragged by the powerful mass. In a state not unlike an earphone cord entered into one's pocket, they were bound hand and foot, letting out groans of anguish.

The ones who were deeply enfolded tried to escape, but the men on the outside were comparatively able to somehow crawl out in small numbers. They united with the men holding the first and second nets. Natsuno Taiyou calculated momentarily in his head.

Objective and method.

In this case, he came to the conclusion that a simple and clear method was the closest thing to the objective.

Picking up the shovel that had rolled over on the ground, he gently crouched. He took the track-and-field athlete position of a crouching start.

"Gugugu"...charging power, and not flexing his muscles • • • he kicked the ground with only level power.

"Crunch"! The sound of shoes carving through asphalt could be heard. Shortly after, Taiyou's body flew like a cannonball.

It was not the kind of sprinting until now, and it was bit different from leaping. It was the skilled movement of the superhuman powers of the games that he was so good at.

In terms of speed it was approximately one hundred kilometers per hour. He had rushed off at a fierce speed of Mach one-tenth.

Michiyo's subordinates expectedly could not hold their surprise. They had prepared themselves when Taiyou had entered into his crouching position, and the moment he had leaped out, while astonished, they had instantly wedged themselves into the line of trajectory.

The men were equipped with close-range weapons in their hands like knives, batons, and stun rods. To deal with Taiyou they had not prepared a single firearm.

The three in the lead swung those weapons with the speed of almost spinal-like reflexes, proceeding to launch an attack.

"Haaaah!"

Taiyou swung the shovel with power.

The greatest weapon comfortable in his hands, the half-remaining blade let out unique metallic sounds, bisecting their weapons in one sitting.

Taiyou didn't know, but the sharp, ear-piercing sound was the special sound of the latest cemented carbide developed by the Juunishima military department. It was of a high cost but was a material of great focus across the world renowned for its high performance, and was a new product professed to be "unable to break no matter what".

What bisected those weapons was "a shovel that was nonchalantly picked up in the vicinity".

The shovel as well as the alloy. Knowing about both of those things, Youran was shocked, far behind him.

Taiyou's charge didn't end there.

With the shovel's point, the opponents' weapons were destroyed, and with the face, the flesh flew everywhere.

It was like slapping someone with a tennis racket.

Taiyou had intended to be merciful, but that hardly fulfilled the meaning of "holding back".

Able to rip an unusually extremely hard and heavy bullet-proof limousine into pieces and fling them away, Taiyou had already surpassed the realm of humanity by a large margin.

From his perspective it was nothing more than the output of breaking through shouji paper with wet fingers, but the men who were slapped by the shovel had all vanished, blown away in ten meter units.

Having crushed one corner of the formation, he stopped moving briefly and spun around looking at his surroundings.

Men with masculine faces and a robust build.

Men with impressive equipment and special corps clothing.

Looking at them, they all resembled the symbol of power. The sort of group that would bring about the sort of image of advancing anywhere with

overwhelming power and overrunning all.

However, right now...

He could tell that the majority of humans there had the look of fear in their eyes. It was clear they were scared of Taiyou's power.

"Withdraw. You can't win against me."

Stabbing the shovel through the asphalt ground, he advised surrender. Taiyou liked bluffs, but this time alone was no bluff. It was advice to surrender after having them feel the stark contrast in power.

"Any more than this is futile."

"But is that really so?"

"What?"

"She is this island's most important personage...the Juunishima head is in a position that even the various prime ministers should shower respect on."

Taiyou was puzzled.

"What are you trying to say?"

"She who is the VIP among VIPs... I am currently in the position to get the jump on her...in other words, cause a coup de'etat."

"Oof."

"Is it conceivable that I would merely come here with this much war potential?"

Taiyou severely lowered his eyebrows.

There was logic to what Michiyo had said. He still wasn't able to comprehend just what kind of a position the head of Juunishima was, but when he thought of it as being the autonomous leader of a million, he could imagine fairly well. Certainly, there was the battle potential of some ten people here, but he thought it was too small to rise in revolt against a human in that position.

"Yer easy to read."

"Huh"

Surprised, he looked behind. Having approached him before he realized it, Youran and Leticia were standing right behind him.

"What do you mean I'm easy to read?"

"If it were a coup d'etat then sure, this amount of power wouldn't cut it, but

this woman is doing something different."

Youran spoke in an easy manner, perhaps because she was speaking to Taiyou.

"Right, this ain't political disturbance, it's political strife at it's best."

"Political strife...so a power struggle."

"Yes, I've been dragged into the confusion of the current house. The confusion of the battle to determine whether Adano or I will be the successor."

"Adano ? "

"The girl named Pochi. Just like me, her name of Juunishima was already determined before she was born."

"Ohh....."

"That woman sold me out and went with the other side."

".....I don't really get it, but are you trying to say that what's going on here now is...reasonable war potential?"

"Right."

"Then, the reason why she said stuff like this"

"Buy time, ain't nothin' else"

"I see....."

Taiyou was relieved. If Youran and Leticia were both affirming that, he thought that it was okay to relax.

But.

"Ya ain't got a good head, do ya"

"Huh ? "

Suddenly disparaged by Leticia, he looked at her wondering what the matter was.

"What do you mean?"

"Method and objective"

Youran said in place of Leticia. Just like Taiyou, she liked that expression. Liking the same expression, and possessing the same thought pattern. Consequently, when she said it like that, he soon understood what she was trying to say.

"There are...other objectives? But what can she do with buying time——"

Thinking that far, he threw a glance at Michiyo.

Preserving the classical image of a maid with her outfit, she displayed a stance with her hands together. Her face was blank like a noh mask, and he couldn't tell what she was thinking.

But that became his support.

"——Ngh ! "

"What's wrong"

Coming next to him, Youran peered at him, quizzically inquiring.

Right this moment, various things connected in a straight line.

There had been more than enough elements...information given to him, and yet he hadn't connected them.

With Youran and Leticia's words, it suddenly caught fire like a fuse.

"Uwooooh ! "

Raising a war cry, he charged forward brandishing his shovel.

In order to protect Michiyo, the heavily equipped men stood blocking in front of her one by one.

But the difference in power was clear.

There was still a remaining war potential of around twenty people, but Taiyou had begun kicking them about in the blink of an eye.

Until shortly before he had had enough leisure to hold back by using the "face" of the shovel, but it had now all changed to an impactful attack.

Bang、clang、slash !

The shovel made a boisterous dance. The men who had blocked Taiyou's way had become a tragic mess.

Bones broken、blood spraying everywhere, the public night road began to transform into a lurid scene of carnage.

After he had scattered all of the men, he confronted Michiyo in a flash. Not bothering to exchange any dialogue, he closed in on her and gave her a blow to the vital points.

Her eyes wide open for an instant, Michiyo thereafter went into a slump as her consciousness left her.

Carrying her on his shoulders, he turned back to the other two.

"Let's go"

"Go? Where?"

"Wherever. We just need to get out of here"

"Ya finally realized...but wasn't that a bit hasty?"

"There's a good reason for that"

"Whazzat"

"I'll explain later. Hey you, can you drive that?"

Youran asked Leticia, looking at the armed helicopter that Michiyo had arrived with.

"If it's a cessna then I can make somethin' of it, but that one's a bit impossible"

"Then we can't get around"

"Yup"

Just as she said, speed was necessary to quickly escape from here. And right now Taiyou and company did not have such capabilities. The trailer limousine remnant that they had used to get here was in the net and couldn't be used.

Taiyou panicked.

What to do, what should they do.

"Taiyou-chan Taiyou-chan, they have Aoba-chan and they're heading this way"

"——Mm ! "

Taiyou caught his breath with a grim face at the nonchalantly speaking Hera who had manifested herself.

Chapter 138: The Girl Known as Juunishima

Youran / Evacuation

It was oft said that there was no meaning in holding a castle down without forces, but on the contrary, the holding down aspect—vying for time was more fearsome than anything else.

That was what Michiyo had done.

Right now, Taiyou's Achilles heel was Miki Aoba.

Taiyou's battle and tactical prowess had been proven in actual combat. He could negate every firearm, make a hundred kilogram unit mass into a missile with his arm power, and he had ripped apart enemy encirclements to where there was nothing but uninhabited wilderness with a shovel.

He who purely excelled at combat no longer had anything he could do.

He himself understood that.

So Taiyou had anticipated two possibilities from the time-saving event.

One was with stronger power.

Shirokiyami, the girl praised as the strongest katana wielder. Possessing the national treasure[Reverse Heaven], she was the girl who was able to bring about twofold afterimages.

Taiyou could not yet win against her. He hadn't even reached her feet.

And for whatever reason she seemed unable to disobey the girl whom she called her older sister. If she were to be ordered by her sister to appear before him as an enemy, things would get very messy.

After all, he couldn't win even if he tried his hardest.

The other one—was even worse of a possibility for Taiyou.

Hostages.

Raised in a house with three wives exchanging conversation on a regular

basis, his bride, Miki Aoba, had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

Aoba was someone precious to Taiyou. With her brought forth before his eyes as a hostage, he would no longer be able to act.

So of the two possibilities, the latter was more critical for him.

He had wanted to pass his imagination off as ridiculous.

However, the bad images that he got had become reality.

The worst possibility had come to pass, and Taiyou's face grew pale.

With Aoba brought before him he had no choice but to surrender.

No matter how strong his individual armed might was, there was just no meaning.

"That's good, with this we can get back Aoba-chan"

"Are they already heading this way ? "

In contrast to the happy-go-lucky Hera, Taiyou's voice was thick with panic.

"Yes indeed...What is the matter Taiyou-chan, you're in such a fluster"

".....Hey, so how long exactly will it take them to arrive ? "

"You too, Youran-chan...Umm, in just a little"

Taiyou and Youran exchanged glances.

"Go"

Youran said in a quiet voice, not with high energy or dignity. This was his first time hearing this sort of voice since knowing her.

"Are you telling me to run by myself"

"Yeah, that's right"

"How could I do something like that, in the first place——"

"Do you still not get the situation? Saekusa Tsukumo is using her as a hostage intending to threaten you"

"I know that"

"Then let me ask you, if she were thrust before you as a hostage, what'll you

do? ...What can you do?"

"Well——"

Trying to speak, Taiyou's mouth flapped open and closed like a goldfish.

That was the very cause of his face paling, the source.

He could do nothing, in fact he had no choice but to do what his companion said.

He wanted to retort to Youran telling him to flee, but when she had said that Taiyou couldn't say another word.

"See, you can't do anything after all. That's really fine, all it is is that the other side is skilled at setting their guard"

Normally he would have probably held her clear explanation in favor, but as of now Taiyou had no such leisure. Rather, he even felt himself wanting to revolt against her for explaining so clearly.

But she continued.

"What do you think needs to be done for the term "hostage" to lose its meaning?"

".....That type of method exists?"

Unlike Kohaku, Youran disliked meaningless conversational exchanges.

Since he understood that about her, he intuitively felt that there was likely some practicality behind these question.

"It does, a really simple one at that"

".....You aren't going to seriously tell me to abandon her right"

"No, idiot"

Youran pursed her lips, making a sulky expression.

Taiyou was vexed at his slip. To think that he made her make such an expression in this situation.

"There's no point telling you things that you can't do. We don't even have time to be disputing right now."

"Tell me, what is it?"

Taiyou said immediately.

Detonated by the phrase "we don't even have time", he had quit thinking.

Putting aside whether or not he could reach the answer by thinking, quickly hearing the answer was unmistakably better than losing time.

Objective and method. In this case, this was a situation in which it was best to lower one's head and ask.

"Just don't let them negotiate"

"Don't let them negotiate ? "

"Yep. What conditions mean defeat for you? If something were to happen to her, right ? "

Taiyou nodded.

That's absolutely right, what about it - - he didn't even want to put that to his mouth. That was just how much he didn't want to think about that worst outcome.

"What needs to happen for that? The other side recognizes the failure of negotiations and seeks to make an example, right?"

"Well that's.....true, but..."

"Yeah, that's obvious. Killing them before using them as a hostage is something an idiot would do"

"There are idiots like dat in dis world, but...there ain't any person like dat in Juunishima"

"Exactly"

".....So?"

It didn't seem like he'd understand anytime soon, so he bluntly asked back.

"Yer really dim"

Leticia cut in with an exasperated expression.

"We're sayin' to git outta here already y'know?"

"Get out of here ? "

He understood the minute he said that. He was finally able to understand what Youran and Leticia had been saying.

".....If no negotiations occur, then no ruptures occur either"

"We've been telling you that. Basically even if they use a hostage for you, it's fine as long as they don't notice you"

Youran said in a bit of an exasperated voice as well.

"You'll run before negotiations, and it's not just you not showing up to the table, it's preventing them from even telling you to come"

"Right, s'like not being able to accept a lawsuit due to absence"

"Yeah. Usually you wouldn't be able to escape ahead with that timing, but you have yourself a joker, don't you?"

"Joker ? "

He asked back, and Youran looked in Hera's direction.

"This girl"

"Yes indeed, I am the joker—"

Hera answered raising her hand.

"Ah....."

"That's right. Just use this girl skillfully and run around. At least have that girl confirm the safety of the hostage before meeting Saekusa Tsukumo. This girl can't be seen by them, right"

"Ah, right"

"That's how it is, so hurry up and go. I'll keep them at bay here"

"Wha-"

"Don't get all surprised, remember that there's no time. Or do you have any other ideas? Something that'll let you take me along too"

"But still——"

Taiyou insisted that even so he couldn't accept that.

He didn't consider leaving Youran there to keep the opponent at bay abandoning Aoba, but it was something difficult for him to accept.

As he was hesitating, Youran took a sigh and looked instead at her close friend.

"Letii, I leave it to you"

"Ya.....ya ain't gonna die right?"

"If it's me alone.....if the opponent is Saekusa Tsukumo.....、for the present I should be left alive"

"Will you hold?"

"....."

Youran silently answered Leticia's question.

The two of them gazing at each other, their exchanging glances were equivalent to many words.

"Ya.....nah, alright"

The exchange between the true friends ended. Entrusted with a task, Leticia looked in Taiyou's direction.

"C'mon, let's go"

"Wait, are you seriously leaving her?"

"Darn skippy"

"That's——"

"Sorry, but ya see, I'm that girl's close friend"

Leticia said, slamming a sword hand into the nape of Taiyou's neck.

"Wha....."

An attack that caught him off guard, a close range attack.

His vision revolved.

Lastly he could see Youran's smile faintly.

Why was she smiling.....with that puzzlement as his last recollection, Taiyou went on to let go of his consciousness.

Chapter 139: The Girl Known As Juunishima

Youran / Score

One truck was running along Juunishima at night. In the trunk rode several men and women, and when they stopped at a traffic signal, the driver of the car alongside them looked quizzically at them, but with just one glare from one of the women, the driver, panicking, averted their eyes.

"Chan Suu, don't bother with small frys"

Just one man riding in the trunk lightly rebuked the girl.

Surrounded by women, Saekusa Tsukumo was sitting cross-legged in an arrogant manner.

One girl rested her head on his lap, using it as a pillow. She had a youthful face and was resting curled up like a cat, but even in that state, the fact that she had quite the physique was evident. Tall enough to where if she were to stand up she would probably be around one hundred ninety centimeters.

"Oi Honoka, hurry up and move, my feet are falling asleep"

"No—"

The tall girl named Honoka refused in a spoiled tone. She shook her head on his lap, instantly rubbing her cheeks against him like a cat.

"Don't wanna— don't wanna—、 I wanna do this for a bit longer—"

"If you don't give it a rest, I vill kill you right 'ere"

Chan Suu, who had relented when scolded by Tsukumo, glared at her with open hostility, speaking with the typical foreigner's intonation. Not only that, but she also thrust her hand into her bosom, appealing • • • that she could draw at any time.

"All of you, please give it a rest"

Before Tsukumo could open his mouth, a girl operating a tablet computer rebuked them. In contrast to Honoka she was one hundred forty centimeters

tall or so with a short height, but her chest area was fine enough to give many a gravure idol a run for their money.

The so-called big-breasted loli girl's name was Haku. Chan Suu and Honoka who she had spoken to directed their gazes to her simultaneously.

"I'd welcome trash and dregs smashing each other, but please leave it for earlier or later than the operation. Doing that sort of thing, if there would be something to hinder the operation——"

Haku said, glaring at the two with a completely changed face.

"——I'll kill you"

The moment she said that, Chan Suu as well as Honoka shivered. Chan Suu lowered the hand that was concealed in her bosom, and Honoka also stopped resting on the lap and slowly raised her body.

Looking at the two, Haku who had returned her expression to normal looked downward, returning her sight to her tablet.

Operating something with accustomed hands, shortly after, the two who had been glared at like a snake or whatever had electronic sounds come from them at the same time.

It was the sound of receiving mail, and both of them took out their ringing smartphones, checking them.

"Mayel?"

"Zis is...your confounded work"

They looked at Haku quizzically at the same time.

"I have picked up several outside points where there are no people or any hindrances, so if you're going to do it you might as well duke it out somewhere there's no people. If you do it after the operation then there will be no conflict"

Chan Suu and Honoka looked at each other with complicated expressions.

"When you go at it, it would be amazing if one of you could do me a favor and die. Like poison, the person who survives as a result of the fight between trash and dregs should be useful"

Haku said, grinning. Sweat was languidly flowing from their shoulders as she said that.

"Oi oi, what are you doing without my permission"

When the atmosphere had become complicated, Tsukumo cut in with a light manner to shift that.

The Absolute One in this place, Saekusa Tsukumo.

The two females who realized that he was covering for them embraced him at once.

"Uwaaan, I was scareed"

"I wet myself, just a bit"

"Aw—there there, you don't have to worry anymore"

Tsukumo said, patting their heads. The two women who had been glaring at each other with animosity and intimidation earlier had been charmed by him like cats.

There was a girl who had been watching the course of events.

Unlike Tsukumo and the rest it was a ponytailed girl riding in the trunk.

Hans and feet tied up, Miki Aoba was looking at the people in front of her with complicated eyes on a league above Honoka and the others.

The signal became green, and the truck began to run.

Looking around the perimeter, Tsukumo noticed Aoba's gaze.

"What's wrong"

"Just what are you guys"

".....Do you like mother daughter bowls?"

"Eh ? "

"Mother daughter bowls man, mother daughter bowls, the kanji symbols are for[mother]and[daughter]、 not parent and child but mother and daughter. I mean that kind of mother daughter bowl. You see, I love those mother

daughter bowls, and I've set myself to be the man who risks his life for them"

Tsukumo said, stealing Chan Suu's lips and reaching under Honoka's clothing to rub her chest thoroughly with his open hand.

The sound of glutinous water was heard from their connected mouths, and heavy breathing escaped the child-faced Honoka's mouth.

Aoba unconsciously averted her eyes from the sudden cheap AV-like scene unfolding before her.

Having stopped kissing, Tsukumo spoke to her.

"Although I'd have liked you too, unfortunately your mothers weren't all together. If all four of your mothers had come to this island I was ready to request them by all possible means. Ah too bad too bad"

"H-How serious are you?"

"I'm serious whenever. Cause I've set my current self to behave in that fashion."

""Set", what kind of weird things are you——"

Aoba said, but soon held her tongue.

Hearing her words, Honoka had stood up abruptly.

Only looking at her face she was a child-faced pretty girl, but that height was close to one hundred ninety centimeters.

The height that would have no trouble fitting in men's basketball looked down at Aoba.

It was like being overlooked from above the heavens.

That distance stirred up Aoba's fear.

"Weird thiiiings?"

"Eh ? "

"Right now, were you saying "weird things"?"

"Th-That wasl——"

"You said it didn't youuu"

"That was, speaking about his word choice——"

An unknown fear assailed Aoba, she had initially tried to vindicate herself, but before she could, Honoka had crouched, pushing her shoulders.

"Kya-"

Pinned on the trunk, Aoba's head crashed, letting out a scream.

Honoka approached her, touching the hands tied behind her back.

She grabbed Aoba's narrow index finger——

"Ehhh-ee"

Snap.

The carefree voice and the sound of a finger snapping occurred at the same time.

A short interval later, Aoba's scream pierced the night sky. When Honoka released her hand, Aoba's index finger was visibly bent in what was an ordinarily impossible direction.

"Hmmm, sorta doesn't seem good enough. Think I'll go for another oneee"

"Maybe you could use zis?"

Chan Suu said, holding out a gun to Honoka. It was a small model that fit snugly in the palm of the hand but it was unmistakably the real deal.

"Wonder what I should dooo"

"Stop it you two"

Tsukumo halted them with a quiet voice.

"Kaaay"

"I understand"

"Haku, treat her"

"Treat this garbage?"

"Even she has mothers, you know"

"Yes yes, I understand. It's always that isn't it"

While complaining discontentedly, she drew close to Aoba, applying treatment just as she was told.

"Well of course, a girl who has a mother, basically means that she's a box filled with the possibilities of mother daughter bowl. If we let her live then the chances of becoming my mother daughter bowl increase to fifty percent, and if we killed off one of them then it becomes zero, y'know?"

"Although I think that even if they're hurt a bit they can still become a mother daughter bowl?"

"You don't get it man, hurting them isn't really the issue. It's just that it's best for me to do it. For example hmm.....like Chan Suu"

"You mean zis?"

She said rolling up her clothing. There was a small tattoo labeled[Tsukumo].

"Yeah yeah that thing. Attaching it to mother and daughter at the same time in this fashion is definitely good"

"Mother was[Saekusa].Honestly that would 'ave been better"

"Why's thaaat?"

"I 'ear that in zis country zere is a special meaning in receiving a surname"

"Ohhh that's very truuue"

"It's difficult isn't it, all that"

"Not at all"

Tsukumo exaggeratingly shrugged his shoulders, afterwards turning back to Aoba.

Crouching, he peered straight in from the side of Haku who was applying treatment.

"It's truly a disappointment, that your mothers didn't all come"

Aoba trembled.

The peering Tsukumo's eyes were scary. These were the eyes that she had encountered before in her life.

Madness.

That vocabulary ran through her head.

She felt madness, not just from Tsukumo but from everyone here.

Fear assaulted Aoba.

(Natsuno-kun.....)

Hoping against hope, Aoba called the boy's name in her heart.

Chapter 140: The Girl Known As Juunishima Youran / Haku and Tsukumo

"Wh-What do you plan to do with....."

"Relax, we won't harm you any more"

"Eh ? "

"At least not until we reach where that boy is"

"W-Why..... ? "

"Because you are a hostage"

Haku said from the side. She spoke in a courteous manner but there was faint ill intent and despise oozing out, transmitting.

"We will use you as a hostage in order to make Natsuno Taiyou listen to us. So until then we are saying that we will not hurt you. Honestly, if it were me then I wouldn't do something like directly take you there"

"Why..... ? "

Aoba fearfully inquired from Haku, who was clearly conveying her malicious intent.

"If it were me I would only take a portion of you with me"

"Portion ? "

"That pretty ponytail or.....perhaps the second joint of your fingers"

"Eek-"

"If we were to take you with us then there's the unfortunate possibility that you'd be taken back on the spot, and that's a poor move"

Haku said, looking at Tsukumo. He had been criticized but was acting like it didn't concern him.

"Haah, well if this is how it's going to be then I will exert all of my effort"

"My bad"

"Please don't only react to that, it's too convenient"

"I'll be affectionate to you later, kay"

"I refuse even over my dead body"

Haku flatly declined.

Aoba developed the slightest question about that reply, but her head was still paralyzed with fear so she couldn't process it very well.

Suddenly, the tablet that Haku had had rang. It was some sort of calling sound, and Haku operated it, pointing the screen in Tsukumo's direction.

An image was displayed filling the screen, and projected there was the image of a girl wearing a hakama. It seemed like a videochat function using a tablet.

"How is it Chie"

[I've grasped the location of New Moon Director, I'll forward it to Haku]

"Is that right, good job"

[Heeey, I think after all I should come with——]

"You're not suited for this occasion, obediently wait"

[.....Kaaay]

She seemed a little unsatisfied, but even so she was rebuked by Tsukumo, so Chie backed off.

The video chat was severed, and Haku pointed the screen to herself, checking the sent information, and conveyed it to the person driving.

On the side, Tsukumo returned his gaze, staring at Chan Suu and Honoka.

"This time Chie isn't well suited, you guys are the confidants.....I leave it to you"

"Yeah, I got iit"

"Leave it to me"

The two of them answered. Tsukumo nodded at the two, suddenly taking two small boxes out of his pocket.

They were small elegant boxes of velvet manufacturing. First Tsukumo opened one of them with a whack sound.

There was a ring inside, a ring emitting a calm glitter.

Tsukumo took that ring in his hands, splitting it in two vertically from the center with a whack.

The wide breadth ring become two narrow rings.

"Chan Suu"

"Yes"

Chan Suu who was called made a meek face and stood before Tsukumo. Tsukumo took her hand, putting one of the two split rings on her finger.

He put the remaining one on his own finger.

"I leave it to you"

"Leave it to me"

"Honoka"

"Yeees"

The hundred ninety centimeter girl answered standing before Tsukumo. Just like what he did for Chan Suu, he took out a ring from the other box, split it in two, and put each half on her and his fingers.

"Uwaaah"

In contrast to Chan Suu with an uncrumbling nihilistic expression, Honoka stared at the ring that had been placed on her ring finger, enraptured.

The rings fitted on the two females, and the split ring pieces fitted on Tsukumo's fingers.

Aoba didn't understand what they were doing and for what purpose they were doing it, but intuitively, she grasped just one thing.

Ritual.

She didn't understand the meaning or the reasoning, but she comprehended intuitively that it was a variety of ritual.

As for the extent of the effects— —

"I'm counting on you"

""For your sake""

Honoka and Chan Suu said together, jumping off from either side of the trunk simultaneously.

"Huuuuh ? "

Surprised, Aoba followed them with her eyes.

The two who had jumped off each landed, soon disappearing and no longer in sight.

She turned back to Tsukumo with a start. He had been looking at Haku.

"What about directions from above"

"None at all, it would seem that as usual they have left it to us, the decision-making on-site"

"Thankfully"

"At some point we may very well be discarded, I think that it is best that we are at least prepared for that much."

"That's not it"

"It's not ? "

"Yep, not the mistaken "at some point we may very well be discarded", but rather "at some point we will absolutely be discarded""

"That's right, that pig was that type of woman after all"

Haku said, smiling gracefully.

"Well, I don't really care anyway. Even if I am discarded. At that time I will gain a reason to send that pig without reason to the abattoir, right?"

"Hahaha"

Tsukumo laughed, a cheerful laugh unlike that of Haku's.

"H-Heey"

"Hm? What is it"

"Those two right now.....could they be going to where Natsuno-kun is?"

"It's not quite that, but well, it might as well be"

Haku answered, returning a glance at the same time as if asking "And what of it?"

"Heyy, there's still time. Have them stop"

"Have them stop?"

"Yeah, after all.....if they went to Natsuno-kun's place, those people might get hurt....."

Just as she said, right now sympathy for the two girls was born in her heart.

The reason why she could hold such emotions for her enemies...for Honoka who had mercilessly broken her fingers was clear.

It was the rings.

The rings that Tsukumo put on their fingers.

With the coming of the sortie, doing ritual-like things, and the rings placed on those fingers.

The two girls who stared preciously, lovingly at those things.

Those expressions had changed to resolution. Aoba had observed that moment from close quarters.

The girls who solidified their will to fight for the man they loved. The scene now had no room to be interpreted otherwise.

Though their positions may differ, Aoba could understand those feelings. Even she would have thrown herself out there if Taiyou did the same thing to her.

The two rings, the symbol connecting the two.

If that was put on her finger, she was sure she'd be able to do anything.

Surely Chan Suu and Honoka held no fear moving straight for Taiyou.

But Taiyou was strong. Aoba wasn't sure just how strong he was, and she wasn't at all sure just how much power those two held.

But she couldn't imagine the two of them returning unscathed after heading for Taiyou. If anything she thought it more likely that they would make frantic efforts for Tsukumo's sake all the while suffering large wounds.

Now that she had seen the faces of those girls, it was a scene that she didn't want to see.

At least that's what she had said to Tsukumo.

"Well, they probably will a bit"

Tsukumo said with a nonchalant face.

"Eh ? "

"But why do you care"

"Are you.....okay with that ? Putting those rings on means....."

"Ah, this ? "

Tsukumo put the rings on and took them off. It was such a casual action that it made Aoba's eyes open wide.

"When I do this, they'll work even in the face of death. Has more results than clumsily kissing or hugging them. Women are mysterious beings"

"No way, so that earlier.....was a lie ? "

"Not really a lie"

Tsukumo answered with scornful laughter.

"I'll love you, so work for me. When you return I'll love you even more, so work with all your effort. See, nothing contradictory there right?"

"You put the rings on them with that mentality? What do you take women to——"

Aoba was indignant. From her viewpoint what Tsukumo did was something much too difficult to accept.

She didn't know the details, but there was no mistake that Tsukumo had several females serving him.

Aoba knew that it took amazing resolve to share a man with multiple women.

Because she had seen her parents, and most importantly because she had experienced it.

Ahead of that was however much one's heart allowed, which she understood, but if that was fake— —.

It was something that Aoba could simply not accept.

"You! Are you still okay with that?"

She pressed, facing Haku.

"I've currently set myself to be a person who loves mother daughter bowls"

Tsukumo suddenly said that.

"Huh ? "

"So she's outside of my target range"

"Huuuh ? "

"You could just set yourself to be a filthy sis-con bastard already"

Haku breathed a deep sigh.

"Big Brother"

"Huuuuuh ? "

Chapter 141: The Girl Known as Juunishima Youran / A Man Worth Protecting

"B-Brother and sister?"

"Yes, and what of it? Do you intend to say that we don't resemble each other or something, we are in fact through and through siblings born from the same womb. Although I've exceedingly accepted that"

"Y-You've accepted it"

"Yes, of course"

"I haven't though, I can't accept that the mother daughter bowl shrunk to one set"

"Like I said, just hurry up and reset your personality"

"Resetting my personality isn't that simple. First it must be done on the sixteenth night when a shadow approaches the new moon——"

"Yeah yeah, thank you for the made-up story"

Haku nonchalantly dealt with her brother. Aoba's eyes were wide open watching the exchange between the siblings.

Though she was captured, the females who had showed up with Tsukumo were all mother and daughter pairs. Honoka and Chan Suu who had left now were that way too, and she had witnessed that Chie who had contacted them from the tablet also had a mother named Chiyo who had a kunoichi outfit.

So although she had not actually seen them, Aoba anologically reasoned that Haku as well was entered in Tsukumo's so-called mother daughter bowl.

However, that was not the case. She was Tsukumo's younger sister.

The young man in his latter twenties, and the high school girl.....no, she looked more like a child-faced big-breasted middle school girl.

These two were quite separated in age for siblings.

"In any case big brother, was it alright to only have those two go?"

"Is there a problem ? "

Tsukumo returned with a nonchalant face.

"I believe that Natsuno Taiyou is a man who we cannot quite underestimate. At first I thought that he was an ordinary high schooler, but that does not seem to be the case. He has a physique that bullets do not work on and superhuman strength, and there's also his quick-wittedness. There are probably only a handful of Japanese people who could win against that boy in close combat. Honestly, the load is too much for food scraps to go up against a tardigrade, I think"

"Right, I think so too"

"Then why did you have them go?"

"Because those two succeeded in the previous mission."

".....What are you talking about ? "

"Sure punishment or reward, if they succeed then a reward, if they fail then a punishment, those are the conditions but.....I honestly think that they're cuter when punished rather than rewarded, the mothers included"

".....Are you saying that because you want to tease them in bed, you intentionally sent them somewhere to fail?"

"That's right"

"I see, then I understand. But if by any chance those two get done in by Natsuno Taiyou then what will you do?"

"So you're worried about them"

"Worried? Yes, I am worried"

"Hoh ? "

Tsukumo's face had a look of extreme disbelief. He did not think that Haku was truly concerned for their safety, showing on his face.

Aoba was the same, and what she had gathered from knowing their sibling relationship a moment ago, Haku's personality didn't convince her that she was

the type of girl to think that way.

"They are ingredients that can be eaten raw, and yet you go out of your way to roast them and then cook them too much and burn them. That is what I am worried about"

"Ohh, that kind of worry"

Tsukumo accepted that, whereas Aoba was unable to understand very well.

"It'll be alright, cause that boy has a poor endgame"

"Is that so ? "

"Yeah that's right, he has power but feels like he doesn't really understand its use. In addition, he hesitates to attack humans in the flesh. Usually if you had that much power you could surely quickly turn a limited human into a lump of flesh, but that guy doesn't have it in him. The power that he has and the way he uses it are too unbalanced"

That's really true, thought Aoba secretly.

Whether one would be convinced with the explanation about Taiyou's power and utilization or not would depend on knowing about Hera's existence.

Aoba knew, which was why she was convinced. Tsukumo didn't know, which was why he had logically judged it as odd.

"Welp, I dunno what would happen if he did have it in him, but even if that were the case——Chan Suu and Honoka would probably both noncommittally do what they could and then turn tail and flee"

"I see, I am satisfied then"

"Later I'd noncommittally bind them up and harass their mothers, that's all"

"The mothers as well ? "

"I've set myself to be a man who loves mother daughter bowls, what would I do if I didn't harass both sets? Because of their own mistakes their mothers are dragged in as well.....I shiver just thinking of it"

".....You really are a pervert"

"Is that right ? "

"Yes, I am relieved that you are the same as ever.....and it seems that we have a call"

A transmission appeared in the tablet, and Haku pressed the receiver button, reporting to Tsukumo.

"This is Tardigrades.....Hello"

[Ummm, it's over. Captured]

".....You got captured of all things?"

Haku furrowed her eyebrows. It was a sortie with failure in mind, but she expressed her displeasure at this outcome.

However, the outcome become even more of an unexpected outcome.

[Nooo. We captured her, new moon-samaa]

"Huh ? "

"Huh ? "

[Huh ?]

The stupid voices reverbated continuously in the trunk.

The light truck stopped, and Tsukumo and Haku hopped off. Before them were an unhurt Honoka and Chan Suu, as well as the figure of a redtrained Youran.

Haku briskly walked over, halting in front of Youran.

"Juunishima New Moon"

"Saekusa Momo"

"Don't—ngh ! Please do not refer to me by that name ! "

"You are the third person to call me that"

The quarreling conversation between Youran and Haku, to an onlooker..... such as Aoba who was captured in the trunk, it was unclear what meaning there was in that, but she could tell clearly that they did not get along.

"Haku"

"Big brother ! "

"You first"

"But ! "

"....."

".....Understood"

This was another exchange that Aoba could not understand. Rebuked by Tsukumo, Haku reluctantly stepped back.

She moved aside, replaced by Tsukumo standing before Youran.

"Are you alone, New Moon-sama"

"I am"

"That boy.....where is Natsuno Taiyou ? "

"I know not"

"Of course you would, you were with him just a moment ago after all"

"I know not, since I entrusted that boy to Princess Leticia. Though we have had a long relationship, not even I can read her movements"

"I see, as expected"

"What do you mean as expected ? "

Haku questioned Tsukumo.

"There isn't any way to answer if you don't know. She entrusted him to a trustworthy but unpredictable partner, so no matter how much we ask her she can't answer. Using us as an example.....Haku, it would be like you leaving it all to Honoka and having me escape"

"Talking about mee ? "

".....I see"

Honoka was taken aback whereas Haku nodded heavily.

"As expected of New Moon-sama, thinking up to two, no three steps ahead, such marvelous direction"

"But Big Brother, regardless, we have secured New Moon's person. Let us now take her to where her mother——"

"No, that'll be postponed"

"Huh ? "

Haku was taken aback.

"What is the matter Big Brother, you said that once we capture New Moon and send her to her mother you would destroy their pride as women and their personalities, did you not"

"Yeah, that was my original intention. But I've changed my mind"

"You have changed your mind.....what do you mean ? "

Haku was shocked. Tsukumo was staring not at said younger sister, but at Youran, standing firmly.

"Juunishima New Moon Director Youran. Before I had set myself as the current me I was your fan"

"....."

"To tell you the truth, there was no need to wrap your okaa-sama in this situation, but I intended to wrap her up in this with sophism, if circumstances permitted it"

"Doubtless, I did feel roundaboutness"

"The aforementioned you appeared before me as your opponent with hardened resolve, choosing the path of being captured yourself.All to help that boy escape"

"What of it ? "

"What I'm saying is that I've become interested in that boy whom you resolved yourself to help escape. Honestly, in this moment, more so than your great self"

Haku was surprised, hearing Tsukumo's words from the side.

"Is that really it"

"It very much so is, yes? You know, the moment a woman realizes she's been cheated on, rather than the man she more strongly thinks about exacting revenge upon her female opponent, right?"

"I am a woman of high upbringing, I cannot comprehend such emotions"

"Surely you jest"

"No I do not—"

"You do so"

Tsukumo cut into the middle of Youran's words.

"After all, you even anticipated me thinking this way when you got captured, right?"

"....."

Youran closed her mouth. Twintails wavering in the night wind, her face was like that of an unreadable noh mask.

Tsukumo smiled at said girl abruptly.

"It's no problem, I'll go along with it for you. New Moon-sama did after all substitute for him, and it is also a fact that Natsuno Taiyou is that much important of a person to you. It is also factual that I have as a result.....gone so far as to develop a strong interest in that boy. So I'll go along with your intentions."

Tsukumo said, changing his expression.

A cold-hearted expression unlike him.

"Although I believe that I will be taking the fourth step ahead this time around"

Chapter 142: The Girl Known As Juunishima

Youran / Revenge

"Haku"

With a cool-headed expression, Tsukumo called his sister's name.

"New Moon-sama is a guest now, guide her with the utmost care"

"Big Brother? Do you seriously intend to change the plan"

"Yeah, that's right"

"But if you do that——"

"I've already decided it. Until New Moon-sama's sweetheart——Natsuno Taiyou comes do not lay a finger on her, got it"

Emphasizing the word "sweetheart", Tsukumo spoke full of cynicism.

"....."

Haku didn't answer, and Tsukumo looked her puzzled.

"Where's your answer ? "

"Big Brother, if we do that then that hag will not accept it. After all, we were entrusted with this mission with Big Brother's • • thing included"

"Just nonchalantly gloss over that part"

"I cannot fool her! That hag——"

"This isn't like you, Saekusa Momo"

"Do not call me by that name!"

The intensity that she had directed toward Tsukumo was now directed toward Youran.

Haku had reacted more strongly toward Youran's name for her than countering her older brother. It seemed that name held quite a bit of meaning.

The face glaring at Youran was dreadful, but Youran was not fazed in the

slightest.

She spoke to Haku in a composed manner.

"Is your brother not absolute to you? If it were for the sake of your big brother you could die——I thought that that conversation had entered my ears at one point but.....it seems that I was wrong"

"Speaking like you know me! Even I do not want to say such a thing, however! If I don't say it then Big Brother's position! His personal security!"

"I see, so you are one of those who oppose orders if it benefits their master. A faithful dog indeed"

"Please do not make a fool of me!"

"I meant to compliment you, you realize? It is quite commendable to have a loyal retainer who does not mind admonition. As long as you are by his side Saekusa Tsukumo will undoubtedly be able to expect greater progress. It is enough to make even an enemy such as I jealous"

Youran side, smiling in a sarcastic manner.

"May you continue to support him in that manner——your whole life, as a devoted subordinate"

That moment, she felt she could hear the sound of something snapping.

"New Moonnnn ! "

Haku was enraged. Losing her temper, she took out a revolver from under her clothing, unsuitable for her small frame, pressing it to Youran's forehead.

Daaan !

Without hesitation, the trigger was pulled.

Smoke was billowing out of the muzzle——the bullet had skimmed past Youran's side.

She had not missed on purpose, nor had Youran dodged.

The moment that Haku had moved, almost as if predicting the outcome, Tsukumo had suddenly cut between the two, brushing away Haku's slender hand.

With that the aim had missed, and the bullet flew into the day after tomorrow.

"Big Brother ! "

"Haku"

In contrast to the enraged Haku, Tsukumo was calm to the max.

"I told you, that, New Moon-sama is a guest"

"But Big Brother! This girl called me——"

"You're playing into her hands too much, Haku. Look, New Moon-sama is snickering"

"Eh ? "

Haku looked blankly at Youran.

Tsukumo had said that, but Youran hadn't broken her poker face.

Although she did seem like she may have had a slight elated expression, she was straight expressionless.

"What do you mean?"

"Heey Haku, why are you calling yourself Haku"

"That's....."

"From 百 hyaku to 白 haku 、 why did you take off the[一]"one" from the head? To have the same name as me.....、 was that the only objective?"

"You are incorrect! That is not the case. I——"

"Heey Haku, we don't have that kind of fragile relationship right? We don't have to be defeated by this kind of provocation, yeah?"

Tsukumo said, and Haku opened her eyes wide, taken aback.

"That we're siblings, that we're master and servant.....that we're companions. You can't define our relationship with terms like that, right? Am I wrong?"

Tsukumo said, and Haku looked downward, putting a hand to her abdomen.

At that moment, the fury had dissipated from her face.

"I'm sorry, Big Brother"

"Nah, it's all good"

Tsukumo patted her head, then turned to Youran.

"New Moon-sama, please do not tease her too much. Revenge and such is unbecoming of you"

"You think so ? "

"Indeed, you should be more aloof. Something like revenge is fitting for——"

Tsukumo said, twisting the corner of his mouth into a grin.

"——Vulgar people such as I"

The moment he said that, he put his hands on her collar, lowering it in one go.

Youran's clothing let out ripping sounds as it was torn apart. From the front of her neck to above her navel, her bare skin was exposed to the open air.

"Hold on——"

Aoba to the side got angry, but, she was quickly pressed down by Honoka and Chan Suu.

"Do not move"

"This is the good paaart"

"Kuh....."

Aoba groaned, she could not move an inch pressed down by these two. She was indignant at Tsukumo's sudden riot, but she could do nothing but watch.

Meanwhile, clothing torn and her undergarments exposed, Youran did not move a single eyebrow, staring back at Tsukumo composedly.

Tsukumo was astonished at that reaction.

"Impressive as always New Moon-sama, it seems that this is nothing to you"

"What are you trying to accomplish ? "

"Did I not say revenge?"

"Something such as this, will not so much as become revenge. I will not feel shame from someone of your level"

"Indeed, indeed, of course that would be the case. Because I am no longer a[man]to New Moon-sama. You were unaware several hours ago, and by this point, no longer, right"

"....."

"You are no doubt correct, with me as an opponent. However, what about that boy? Even if he sees you in that appearance, I wonder if you will be able to remain so composed, hm"

"You speak of fruitless endeavors"

Youran slightly scowled.

"Did I not say that this is revenge"

Tsukumo laughed scornfully.

"Revenge is in itself a fruitless endeavor"

"....."

"Although I was half joking. I certainly have some profit from this"

"What do you mean"

"I mean this"

Tsukumo said, further ripping apart Youran's clothing. He stripped that which had become cloth scraps from her, tossing them to Haku.

"Here ya go"

"Big Brother? Wh-What is this"

"Deliver that to Tsubaki-sama, tell her that everything's going according to plan"

"Ah....."

Haku made a surprised expression.

Tsukumo had thought up in his own way a countermeasure from what she had said earlier.

Revenge, and countermeasure. Both of those were actions for Haku's sake.

"I'm so jealouuus"

"Give up"

The two of them exchanged a brief conversation while holding down Aoba.

"B-But will the hag be satisfied with this? Just with these scraps"

"Very true....."

Tsukumo held his jaw, a pensive look on his face.

Just as Haku had said, Juunishima might not be satisfied with just some torn clothing.

Briefly thinking, he then looked at Youran.

"New Moon-sama, I believe I would like to borrow something"

"What is that"

"The thing that is attached to your thumb"

"....."

Silent, Youran lifted her right hand, looking at the thing attached to her thumb.

That thing attached to the base of her thumb was a leather belt in the shape of a ring.

"New Moon-sama regularly wears that. In your everyday life, a real ring, and when you are sneaking around, a leather belt. That very thing is constantly attached to New Moon-sama's right hand thumb. That is correct, yes?"

"It is"

"Tsubasa-sama must also understand the meaning of New Moon-sama's right hand thumb ring. And it is a given that she would also understand the meaning of said thing being snatched away.....normally"

"....."

"In other words, if I put that in with the other thing as a set, she should for the time being be satisfied"

"You're stalling for— —"

"Indeed, I would like your cooperation"

"Very well"

Youran gave a curt response, separating the belt-shaped ring from her thumb and handing it to Tsukumo.

"I thank you for your cooperation"

"....."

"Haku"

"Understood, please leave the hag to me"

"In exchange for my cooperating, I would like you to listen to one request of mine as well"

"If I am able"

"I'd like you to leave that girl here by my side until that boy comes"

Youran had said, pointing to Aoba.

Chapter 143: The Girl Known As Juunishima Youran / The Unfortunate Girl

The truck began entering an area where people were relatively scarce.

The interval between street light and street light became longer, and even the road's pavement began becoming dubious.

It wasn't even good enough of a ride to call it that, and yet the vibrations got worse and the people riding in it were all affected.

Youran and Aoba sitting next to her frowned each time the car body leaped, but Tsukumo and company didn't have much of a reaction, perhaps quite used to this.

"I will make sure to get preparations ready, Big Brother"

"I leave it to you. Ohh and also, prepare a personal missile"

"Personal missile? That one with the guidance equipment attached?"

"Not the Guerilla or anti-group ones, the personal missile that's aimed at the lot who've quit being human"

"What are you saying Big Brother, what do you plan to do with such an expensive thing?"

"Fire at him"

"It is not like you are using it for interior design, I understand that. What I am asking is wht that is necessary"

"I've been saying it constantly since earlier, that I've become interested in what kind of man the boy named Natsuno Taiyou is whom New Moon-sama has taken a liking to. It's clear that things like bullets or rockets won't work, but I was thinking that if not that then what about personal missiles"

"Only for that reason, you say?"

"Yeah"

Tsukumo said, looking at Youran in a slightly removed location and grinning.

"These are goods powerful enough to force that [Shirokiyami]to earnestly deal with them, so I wonder how that boy would fare"

"No matter how you look at it, this is overkill"

Haku sighed with an exasperated face.

"There is going to be a large deficit"

"How haaard you have it, Haku-chan"

"I have already given up, I decided to think of everything that happens until this affair is dealt with as something that[can't be helped]"

"Reeeally, you have it reeeally difficult"

"Haku likes the spicy stuff, so she iz already full"

"What are you implying"

While Tsukumo and company were exchanging a carefree conversation, Youran and Aoba were chatting facing each other.

"You are.....that Juunishima-san"

"Uhh ? You know about me ? "

"Yeah, I heard about you from Kohaku-san"

"Kohaku-san eh, is she well?"

"Yeah, too energetic if anything. Especially when she has strange conversations with Natsuno-kun"

"It was the same when I last met her"

Youran giggled.

Youran sat with her knees together, shoulders taut. Every time the car body leaped, her slender twintails also leaped at the same time.

Unlike Aoba, who was scared.....fearful, even after the ropes binding her hands had been undone, Youran, despite being in the midst of the enemy camp, showed no sign of caring.

"She seems to like that sort of thing, so I would often notice her going on and on happily about incomprehensible things. Like what she's talking about, how the conversation got there, you just can't understand it at all, right"

"Yeah, when you realize. You feel like "Huh, did I miss something?""

"Right? She as well as you are the type of people who like to play dodgeball with words, not catchball. And I'm just not good with that"

"You're not good with that ? "

Aoba asked back gazing in amazement.

"But earlier....."

About to speak, she looked in Tsukumo's direction. He just so happened to also be looking that way, and their eyes met so she averted them.

"It's a little different from that sort of thing"

"Huhhh.....is that right"

Aoba didn't quite get it, but she left it at that.

She stared at Youran.

"What's wrong? You're staring at me"

"Umm.....I have something that I'd like to ask"

"What ? "

"Uhh.....Juunishima-san"

"Oh, just call me Youran, or New Moon"

"Now that you mention it, what do you mean by New Moon? I thought I heard that your name was Juunishima Youran"

"If you Google it you'll see it on Wiki.....but we don't have our smartphones with us so I guess it's impossible. Hmm, explaining these details will take a while, you know"

"I'm sorry"

"No, it's fine. This island was long ago called New Moon Island"

"New Moon Island ? "

"Yes, New Moon Island. Long ago to the point where it's up there with fairy tales, legends, and the like. This island apparently had a day once a month of high tide, and whenever that day came the entire island would sink"

"Eh? This entire island, no way——"

"Well it's a fairy tale, so the world view is erratic"

"Ah, right"

"Mhm. And that day in which the island was submerged was the same day of the month as the new moon, so this island was called New Moon Island. Don't ask if it became that way with the full moon, because I don't know either"

"Ah, okay"

"As a relic of that fairy tale, the distinguished people of this island have been carrying the title of Director of the New Moon. Many years, or rather generationally. So I'm the one who inherited it"

"Uh-huh....."

Aoba made an expression that reflected her not quite getting it. Seeing that reaction, she thought to end the story there.

If she continued talking she would also have to explain the derivation of "Juunishima". Putting aside the interested parties, she couldn't purposely tell those without interest, so Youran thought to change topics.

"Come to think of it, you had something you wanted to ask me?"

"Ah, yes. Umm....."

Despite being the one to bring up that topic in the first place, Aoba faltered. She was fidgeting, as if she were finding something difficult to say.

Youran waited.

A little while later, Aoba boldly broke the ice.

"Have they been pulled already?"

"Huh ? "

Youran's face stared blankly, as if to ask "What are you saying out of the blue?"

"What are you talking about ? "

"Uhh, umm.....you know....."

Aoba hesitated.

"H-Have they already been.....pulled by Taiyou ? "

".....Yeah"

The subject finally came out, and Youran understood what she was talking about.

She understood when she had heard "who". She didn't need to be told "what".

She took her twintails into her hands.

They were two twintails tied from her temporal region, rustling.

And then she looked at Aoba. She saw the straight ponytail tied from the upper part of the back of her head.

"Is your hair also pulled regularly ? "

".....No"

Aoba shook her head.

"Not even once"

"Really? But that's a ponytail. Ah, so that means you don't always have that hairstyle ? "

"No, I'm normally like this"

"Seriously"

Youran frowned.

"You normally have that hairstyle, and yet he doesn't pull it?"

"Yeah....."

".....You are his bride, right"

"Eh....."

Aoba was so surprised that she widened her eyes, soon after timidly nodding.

"Y-Yeah....."

"I'm going to ask straight away, are you close?"

"That is....."

"Can you tell me"

Youran pressed her with a much too earnest face. Slightly overwhelmed, Aoba nodded a bit bashfully.

"Yeah.....I...think so"

"Really now....."

"Ah, but not that close, umm——"

"That guy.....I guess he dislikes me after all"

"Huh ? "

"See, he just pulls my twintails. Every time we meet, aalways. That was definitely malicious"

"Is that.....actually malicious"

"But that's gotta be it, you're his bride, and you're close enough to be favored. But despite having an easy-to-pull ponytail out all the time, you haven't had it pulled even once. Right"

"Y-Yeah"

"Then him pulling mine is because he's just doing it to spite me right"

"Hmm, I don't know about that"

"It's plain and simple. Ahhh gosh! I shouldn't have covered for him"

"....."

"What is it"

"No, Juunishima-san, it's just that you don't seem to be regretting it"

"Well of course, after all I decided that I'd do it. I can't regret that. I don't regret it, it just irritates me"

"Th-Then....."

"Hm ? "

"If you got into the same situation again, what would Juunishima-san do?"

"Like earlier? I'd protect him, of course"

".....Even if you think that Natsuno-kun is spiteful....., from now on?"

"That is that, and this is this"

"Huhhh....."

"Honestly! Pulling a girl's hair just to be mean, what a jerk ! "

"....."

Watching the indignant Youran, Aoba wondered.....if that really was the case.

"I think, rather than being a jerk, he was messing with you"

"Eh ? You also one of those dodgeball folks ? "

"Ah, not that....."

Do you really not know ? Aoba was surprised by the clever-looking girl's reaction.

"That jerk, next time we meet I'm just gonna let it down"

"You're seriously going to do that ? "

"Of course I am! Cause I know it's done out of spite! I'm gonna make sure it never gets pulled again"

".....I think, that you look better keeping the twintails"

Aoba thought a bit.....then said that to her.

Chapter 144: The Girl Known As Juunishima

Youran / Fool

".....Well you are his [bride] after all"

Youran thought a bit, pursing her lips and speaking. Even from the viewpoint of the same sex——Aoba thought her peevish expression was adorable enough to be just a bit envious.

On the other hand, she didn't understand what Youran was trying to say.

"W-What do you mean ? "

"That guy is spitefully——gleefully pulling my twintails. And you're his bride, so you cooperate with him. So that he can pull it again when we meet. Isn't that right"

Aoba became unintentionally exasperated.

"I don't think that's, the case....."

"Then, what is it"

Aoba thought about it briefly, then spoke after a moment.

"Juunishima-san wants to deal damage to Natsuno-kun, right? If he wants to do so, then.....you're saying that you want to just stop him from pulling your hair in the first place"

"Yes, to prevent him from his pleasure——that's my measure to reach my objective of not letting him pull it"

"Then I think this is how it is. Natsuno really wants to pull the twintails in front of him, but maybe if he can't pull them no matter what, it'll greatly damage him. Right there yet unpullable. He can see them but can't touch them. I think that's where the bulk of the damage is"

".....Oooh"

Eyes wide open, she slapped her hands together.

Aoba was comparatively similar. Youran in her “girly mode” would occasionally change her facial expressions: an even more sentimental girl.

"Oh, that way does seem like it would deal him damage"

"Yeah, that's what I think. So I'm thinking that it might be better for Juunishima-san to not lose the twintails. Although Juunishima-san will probably have it hard like that"

"I see I see, hmhm"

Clasping her own jaw, Youran repeatedly nodded.

With a content demeanor, it would seem that she would likely be keeping her twintails fastened when next meeting Taiyou. Aoba was secretly relieved.

(I wonder.....what this person is.....)

Aoba privately tilted her head.

The girl who was almost in front of her was the girl who had been dealing with Tsukumo earlier, in a dignified manner to boot. She was unmistakably the same human, and yet she felt like the opposite in every way, as if she had multiple personalities.

What kind of human might she be.....

Aoba had forced her way to this island because she had wanted to meet her.

The public reason was that one of her mothers, Mio, had come from that island and would be coming along to guide Taiyou, so Aoba was coming along as well.

Taiyou was satisfied with that reason, but Kohaku had sent her off with the kind of smile that sees through everything.

Aoba had come along by hearing about Youran from Taiyou.

She had decidedly mixed feelings, but if she were to abbreviate them to the max they would end up being in the “jealousy” category.

She had heard before that Taiyou pulled Youran's twintails mischievously each time they met, so she had gone to the length of dangling her own ponytail

in front of Taiyou, and yet Taiyou hadn't pulled it. He didn't even try to.

Just why hadn't Taiyou pulled them?

She had secretly asked the three Hayakawa sisters, their hair in braids. If they were braids, closely resembling twintails.....she had asked them that, but they had answered that they hadn't had theirs pulled either.

Just what was the issue, why had Taiyou only pulled Youran's?

Kohaku seemed to understand everything, but she wouldn't tell her even when asked.

That was why she had forced her way along to the island. Because she had wanted to meet this girl named Juunishima Youran——she was interested in her and Taiyou's relationship.

Actually meeting her, Aoba understood.....various things.

At the same time, a new question had emerged.

Ultimately, what kind of person was she?

That was a question formed after actually meeting her.

The truck ran a bit more, arriving at a building that seemed to be the destination.

It was a one-story the size of a gym, surrounded by farmland. It was a construction unfamiliar to Aoba, with a garage actually made inside the building.

The truck was parked inside the garage, and after the shutter had lowered, Youran and Aoba were taken along.

The two of them were led into a room in the far back.

"Now then, stay here briefly, New Moon-sama"

"Right"

Youran nodded, answering in the "New Moon Director" mode instead of what she had used with Aoba.

That was the slightest resistance of revenge.

Youran was intentionally doing that, and Tsukumo also knew that.

The two of them quietly staring at each other, Tsukumo was the first to remove his gaze.

A faint smile on his face, he exited the room, locking the door with a click.

".....There wasn't even any need to so courteously lock the door"

"Huh ? "

Aoba stared blankly at Youran. She decided to explain to her.

"I mean look, there isn't a doorknob or anything attached to this door, right ? "

"Ah.....You're right"

Aoba looked at the door with a start.

What looked like a door had nothing resembling so much as a handle from the interior. Other than a small window near the bottom, there was not a single place attached for grabbing.

"I wonder how they usually open this"

"You don't need to open it. It's just like a penitentiary, made to not be opened from the inside"

"Like a penitentiary ? "

"Right, don't you see the small window below the door? That's for eating and the like, deposit and withdrawal. This room was made to confine people"

"Is.....that right"

"Welp, that's obvious though. If we were instead put into a regular room I'd actually consider it a trap. Cause that his objective is to keep me • • • captured until that guy comes. So in that sense this isn't a torture room but a confinement room"

"Th-That makes sense"

"Now, I wonder how we'll be able to escape"

"Eh, we're escaping ? ! "

Probably quite surprised, Aoba unconsciously raised her voice, opening her eyes wide to the point where the eyelids seemed like they might tear.

She had been listening to the exchange between Youran and Tsukumo, so she hadn't so much as thought that she'd suddenly say something like this. That was what her expression and reaction basically said.

"Well of course"

"B-But.....then why did you remain and get caught by that Saekusa person?"

"Objective and method"

Youran said with an earnest face.

"My objective was to buy time for that guy and Leti to escape. So this just happened to be the method to achieve that. And this has been fairly successful for vying for time, wouldn't you say?"

"R-Right"

"So far it's gone well with staying over there and getting captured, but there just isn't any reason to stay here, for me. Besides, even at this time Tsubaki's faction is chasing Kohaku-san and the others. If I don't go back then I won't be able to issue any orders. If Michiyo hadn't betrayed me then I probably could have made some decisions on the spot"

While saying that, Youran walked around the room. In the dull room, she was doing things like touching and tapping the walls.

"If I don't go back right now the situation can't be helped. Leti might do something about it, but this country probably won't be able to freely move"

While explaining to Aoba, she continued thinking about ways to escape.

She glanced at Aoba.

Just thinking of escape, Aoba would unmistakably become a hindrance.

According to Youran's info, Miki Aoba was born in a unique household, which gave her a unique thought process, but power-wise she was a girl with nothing of special mention.

Even amongst those also under Taiyou, for inhuman traits Hera went

without saying, Kohaku had intellect that made her someone good for accompaniment, and the three sisters even had some sort of telepathy that could be used as a trump card when it came down to it. Adano could even be useful in the worst case as a human pillar.

However, only this Aoba was a girl who could not become any means of escape for this objective.

She had actually been looking at her to figure out what to do with her.

"Juunishima-san"

"Yeah, what ? "

"If it's me you're worrying about, please don't, if you can escape by yourself then please do"

"What are you saying ? "

The so-called hindrance of a girl had said something unexpected.

At first her heart had skipped a beat thinking her thoughts had been read, but Youran decided then to ask back without showing a shred of trembling.

"Right now, I feel like I understand the reason why Taiyou-kun pulls Juunishima-san's twintails"

"Huh ? "

"You resemble each other, Natsuno-kun and Juunishima-san. Especially when you say "objective and method" as a catchphrase. So I think that's probanly the foundation of why Taiyou wants to pull your twintails"

"Sorry, could you explain in a way that's easier to understand?"

"I won't be telling you that"

Aoba grinned.

"Anyhow, that's how I figured it out. If I were to think from Natsuno-kun's viewpoint, Juunishima-san would think I was a hindrance to escaping"

"So you're telling me to leave you because he'd say that?"

"That I do not know, whatever Natsuno-kun would do. What I do know is only

that Natsuno-kun would fret over this. Whether to take me with him, or to not go"

"Got it"

"And then I tried thinking from Natsuno-kun's viewpoint about.....objective and method"

"You tried ? "

"Yes, earlier.....what Juunishima-san said. In order to rescue Kohaku and the others, that we should get out of here as soon as possible. If we have that as our objective, I really think that Juunishima-san should go ahead alone"

"I see"

Youran stared at Aoba.

For no particular reason, she recalled when she had first met Michiyo.

She had thought Michiyo to be a trusted retainer, someone who she didn't mind entrusting with the authority of the Juunishima chief of a million.

"Yeah, I get what you're trying to say"

Youran nodded, and even in that moment, Aoba's expression did not falter.

That's why she made a decision.

"Let's escape together"

While being born as someone with authority, Juunishima Youran had another treacherous face.

Together with logical, she could also be obstinate.

That was the girl named Juunishima Youran.

"That there girl's a fool"

Leticia said above the sea.

Chapter 145: The Princess of Phili /

Challenge

"M.....m"

"Taiyou-chan! Have you come back to us Taiyou-chan! Do you know who I am ! ? One (一) plus (+) one (一) equals (=) a rice paddy field (田んぼ) ! ?"

"Shut, up.....Don't shout near my ears....."

"Oh, so you can hear me! Taiyou-chan! My Taiyou-chan ! ! "

"Speaking like you own me or something....."

Getting up, he held down the back of his head, which was throbbing in pain. His thoughts were all over the place, but he could still tell that there was a noisy fairy squawking near his ears.

"I'm glad....."

"And what even happened to me....."

"Seems ya came to"

"——mm ! "

He gained full control of his senses upon hearing the unusual Kansai dialect. Getting up with a start and surveying his surroundings, the door opened, and the blonde-haired blue-eyed girl came entering the room along with two guards.

With the same appearance as earlier, she sat in a removed location from where Taiyou had been sleeping, and the two black-clothed guards were waiting behind her with relaxed postures. Despite being in a room, they were still wearing sunglasses and he couldn't tell where they were looking, so Taiyou felt keen pressure.

"How ya doin' ? "

".....Horribly, thanks to you"

He instantly remembered what had happened just prior. As he was arguing back and forth with Youran, he had been hit in the neck by her with a striking hand.

Then he had lost consciousness, waking to find himself here.

He glanced outside the window. It would seem that night had not yet turned to day, as the sky was still dark. But unlike earlier, he had been carried away not to another outside location, but inside.

"Seems like yer gonna be fine. Welp, not like my thin arms could do much inniway"

"For thin arms, you made quite the punch, wouldn't you say ? "

"It's a maiden's etiquette"

"In what world is there a maiden who chops a sword hand into someone's neck"

"In the world of high society"

Leticia said, making a bitter smile unbecoming of her magnificent appearance.

"Humans like me mostly have that sorta thing in them, ya know ? Though we're also taught to give up whenever we can't finish a sneak attack in one blow"

"....."

"In that sense ancient Japan is logical. Ya know, didn't women of the past slip daggers between kimono and bosom? Those are used for resistance, and also for suicide when all else fails. Our taijutsu is the same as that"

"....."

"Wanna know why I know that much? See, our country——the Phili kingdom is the most pro-Japanese country. They like Japan too much and a mere few have Japanese blood a few generations back. Heck, even my middle name——"

"....."

Taiyou was completely silent as he glared at Leticia, strongly insisting

implicitly that he did not intend to tag along with her banter.

As if that had transmitted, Leticia deeply sighed, slightly lowering her tone and changing the topic.

"Dun glare at me like that, it was unintentional to hit ya down"

"Why did you do such a thing"

She had finally responded, so Taiyou cut to the chase.

"Cuz we're best friends"

"Best friends ? "

"Didn't ya think it weird? That gurl wanted ya to escape and I gladly cooperated. No matter how ya look at it that's what 'appened. But if anything I was like[Ya sure ?]and confirmed, ya know ? "

"Then, what was the reason for accepting that from her at the end?"

"Yer sayin' dat's a bad thing ? "

"I want to know the reason"

After a brief interval, Leticia answered.

".....Folks like us, see, we hardly ever get to have our free will granted. We get wrapped up in a lotta things more than the average person and our own will is constantly put on the backburner"

"So you're saying that you'll grant your wishes when you get tge chance ? "

"And I might add that it's if there's someone who can grant it"

Leticia's smile became paler.

"In dat situation, I was probably the only person in the world who'da left 'er there. Opposite is also true"

"That's also, because you're best friends ? "

"Yup"

"Alright. Then let me ask one last thing"

"Wut"

"Where was she taken"

Taiyou stared straight at Leticia, asking as if pressing her.

His gaze that was mostly a glare seemed to be saying "You're best friends so you know right".

"It should become clear to ya soon"

"And telling me about it would violate your "best friend" code ? "

"Till the prerequisites are clear I ain't gonna tell ya"

".....Is it Aoba"

"Yup"

Leticia nodded.

"I dunno the specifics, but till that ain't cleared, you movin' is gonna have the opposite effect"

"....."

Losing his words, Taiyou bit his lower lip. Just like Leticia had said, Youran had remained at that place and had Taiyou escape was because they had Aoba, and there was nothing that could be done until that was resolved.

"I'm gonna ask ya summat"

Without hesitation, Leticia began asking Taiyou in a no-nonsense manner.

"What"

"What was your joker that girl mentioned"

"——m ! "

Taiyou caught his breath. Hera was near him, but he didn't dare look there.

He simply gazed at Leticia, asking back.

"Why do you ask"

"We needa grasp da situation. Ya din actually think I'd leave the girl there didja?"

"....."

"We're besties, me an' that girl. If ya had to ask how close, enough to abandon each other when it comes down to it"

"So earlier....."

"Can't just leave her like that if she's my one and only bestie right ? "

"....."

"She wanted that earlier, so I granted it. Now it's my turn. Plus she ain't said dun come for her"

"You....."

"Anyhoo, I wanna know what the "joker" of yours that she said was"

"....."

Taiyou hesitated.

How should he begin....., he hesitated in that regard.

"Could it be some sorta spirit ? "

"Huh ? Why do you think that"

Taiyou's heart skipped a beat.

"At dat time, when she talked 'bout that joker, yer conversation was super weird. Sorta like one or two more people were there.....or like ya were talking to someone via phone, that sorta way"

"Ah....."

"Ya dun realize it eh, well whatevs. Also"

"Also ? "

Is there something else? Taiyou furrowed his brow.

"Right after ya woke up ye was talkin' to someone weren't ya. Right before I came into the room. I thought this room could be used fer transmissions so I jammed it but since ye was still talkin' I thought it was probably some sorta ghost or whatnot"

He couldn't even make a guttural sound. Once the origin was made that clear, Taiyou could no longer talk it off.

"Taiyou-chan....."

Hera may have the same thinking, or maybe she had read Taiyou's thoughts. She had first spoken after Leticia had entered the room.

Taiyou let out words of comfort to her.

"You're not in the wrong. You quieted down when she entered the room. Just means that she was one step ahead this time"

"Plus the situation was just right. If we weren't in this situation then I doubt she'd let out such a simple hint"

"Don't just participate in the conversation like it's something normal, I might actually think you can see her"

Taiyou smiled bitterly.

"But ain't she there"

"Yeah, but she isn't a spirit or whatever, she says she's a fairy"

"I am a fairy—"

"Which means she can be seen"

"Yeah"

"Can I see her too"

".....You can"

"How so"

As opposed to the taciturn Taiyou, Leticia thrust in with curiosity.

"Whaa ! "

"Taiyou-chan, you do not need to fret, yes ? After all, Youran-chan can see her"

"True....."

Understanding precisely what Hera was saying, Taiyou took a deep breath, facing Leticia once again.

"In order to see her, you have to kiss me"

".....Really now"

"Let me add that I've already done so with Youran"

".....I see"

Leticia sighed, leaning back further into the chair she was sitting in.

"That's fatal"

Chapter 146: The Princess of Phili / Cursed Blood

"Fatal ? "

Taiyou didn't understand Leticia's words. The way she said it was weird, plus the phrase "fatal" was rather exaggerated, he thought.

However, it would be incorrect to say that he understood nothing.

Leticia had asked what she could do to see Hera. "What can I do" was a phrase that could also imply actually taking action after learning the answer.

Taiyou had answered saying a kiss with him.

She was a blooming lady, not to mention a princess of a kingdom.

He wanted to convince himself that the term "fatal" was an exaggeration, but he could understand why she'd sigh about that.

"Any other methods ? "

"I dunno, are there ? "

He threw the question Leticia asked right at Hera.

"Copulation is fine—"

"I'm gonna hit you"

"What, she say summat"

"Nothing of actual substance"

"What'll that be ? "

Leaning forward, Leticia began staring straight at him. It was like she was implicitly saying to go ahead and tell her anyway.

He hesitated to give it straight, but he could feel that she wasn't going to back down until he said it, so Taiyou decided to just tell her.

"That I could make love with you"

"Making love as in having sex ? "

"Yeah, although she said copulation or whatever. I get that it's what lies ahead of a kiss but.....it's still an answer without substance"

Taiyou was ready for Leticia to get mad, but Leticia answered in an unexpected way.

"I see.....if we did that"

"Hm ? "

Leticia was looking down, holding her jaw with a pensive expression.

Taiyou was befuddled by her reaction. This was a reaction that was unexpectedly unexpected, far diagonally up and away from what he had imagined.

When it came to kissing she disapproved, but when it came to sex she seemed more considerate. This was the stark opposite of how a blooming girl would react.

".....Anything else ? "

".....Is there ? "

"Petti——"

"Seems not"

Cutting off Hera and her unnecessary response, he answered Leticia. Hera didn't like that but she silenced herself.

"That right....."

Leticia said, further in thought.

From Taiyou's standpoint there was no need to kiss Leticia as there was no need for her to see Hera.

Of course, as Youran had said, if he were to use Hera as his joker and have Leticia see her as well to converse then that would be great, but it wasn't particularly bad even if she couldn't.

So initially he had nonchalantly conversed with her to give her enough

understanding.

But Taiyou was intrigued by her peculiar reaction. A reaction full of contradictions that was too unusual for a girl her age.

He was curious as to what reasoning was attached there.

"What have you been hesitating about?"

"I'm wonderin' how far I need'a go for her sake"

" ? I sort of get that. What I mean is.....why is a kiss "fatal"?"

"They say a kiss is no good fer my body cuz of my cursed blood"

"Cursed blood"

Taiyou parroted in a monotone pronunciation. Hera was saying "That is kind of cool" from the side but it didn't reach his ears.

"The heck is that, eighth-grader.....well it seems like you're not going that route huh"

Looking at her earnest face, he understood that she was not • • • suffering anything from puberty.

"Know... 'bout my old man ? "

"Nah"

Taiyou shook his head.

She was the princess of the Phili kingdom so Taiyou assumed that her father must be the king.

The king of a kingdom must be a fairly famous person, but for Taiyou who had heard of the country for the first time, he had no knowledge whatsoever.

"Your father.....the king did something bad ? "

"Da worst of da worst, he's da perpetrator who passed dis annoying physique along to me"

"Annoying physique"

".....Hahh, it ain't summat I would say but if it were dat gurl she'd probably say[objective and method]or what have ya"

"Yeah, she'd probably say that"

"How 'bout I check with ya just 'n case. How much can ya do wit dat trump card"

"She's essentially the same as the spirits you mentioned. She can go through walls and can become my "eye" in areas that I can't see. And well, she can also[connect]"

"How 'bout ya show some evidence"

"I will go see how things look outside—"

Before Taiyou could answer, Hera spoke and flew out the window. She exited the room momentarily, soon returning.

"Taiyou-chan Taiyou-chan, we are above the ocean. It is some sort of amazingly extravagant passenger ship"

"Ocean ? Extravagant passenger ship ? "

Surprised by Hera's report, he looked at Leticia.

"I see, ain't no lie.....seems dat way"

"Why at the ocean ? "

"Cuz we need'a. If it were Japanese territory we wouldn't even be able to properly defend ourselves, plus if we screw up it'll be a diplomatic issue. I am a state guest after all, gotta have a decent amount o' forethought. So we got on a ship and came out to public waters"

"By the way, I did not see land anywhere"

"She says she couldn't see land. We really are in the middle of the ocean huh"

"Right"

After sighing, Leticia made a resolute expression.

"Can't be helped. Hey"

With only her neck aimed at the two waiting wearing black clothing, she spoke to them in a commanding tone.

"Ya guys can go out. Don't enter even if ya hear screamin' or whatnot"

""Yes ma'am""

Briefly responding, the black-clothed guards undid their “relax” postures and went on leaving the room.

He understood the purpose of removing people from the vicinity, but Taiyou didn't quite get what she meant by “screaming”.

"What are you going to do ? "

"We're gonna kiss, not like dere's any other way to see da fairy"

"That's true but.....It's not like we absolutely have to do it"

"We'd best do it to make double sure"

"That's.....true. But is it really fine ? "

".....Can ya promise just one thing ? "

"Promise ? "

"Yep"

Nodding, Leticia thereafter averted her eyes.

"What happens here.....dun tell anyone. What I've done.....what state I'm in"

"What state you're in....."

He thought it was over-the-top, but he shut his mouth upon seeing her appearance.

She was making such a deep expression that Taiyou could no longer think it to be exaggerated.

He was forced to understand that there must be something, some reason for her to hesitate to perform a kiss.

"....."

"Alright"

"Thank ye much"

"Then, wait a moment"

As Leticia puzzledly said “Eh?”, Taiyou looked back at Hera.

"What is wrong Taiyou-chan"

The small fairy tilted her head asking back, and Taiyou firmly gripped her body in a falcon grip, beginning to walk briskly toward the window.

"What what what is wrong Taiyou-chan, what do you plan to do with me ? "

".....Stay out for a bit"

"Whaat, but that's bor——"

Hera tried to say something, but Taiyou ignored her and opened the window.

Everything outside the window was ocean as far as the eye could see. As there was no light in the deep at night, there were stars that completely outmatched what could be seen from the city overhead.

There Taiyou swung——

"Uoooryaaaa ! "

He threw Hera with all his strength. Becoming not a parabola but a straight line orbit, Hera became a star and flew off afar in the sky.

Shutting the window, he returned to Leticia.

"Now it's fine"

"She gonna return ? "

".....Even she knows how to read the air. Although she's normally a pain in the ass"

"Kay"

Taiyou and Leticia stared at each other through the silence.

(Looking closely.....)

She was a breathtakingly beautiful girl.

Whether it was because of her blonde hair and blue eyes making her look precisely like a princess, she reflected more dazzlingly in his eyes than any girl he'd met before.

He would now be kissing said girl——Registering that anew, his chest

suddenly began pounding.

"Then.....let's do it"

Putting hands on his shoulders, Leticia silently nodded, lifting up her face, and softly closed her eyes.

Taiyou felt drawn by these charming, bewitching lips as he drew closer.

—smooch.

Lip and lip overlapped.

Soft like a marshmallow, hot like magma.

(These are.....her lips)

He developed a type of excitement toward the direct entwining of chest and groin.

He had no intention of making a comparison—it would be rude to compare this to any of his brides.

But although he felt that way, he still ended up comparing them.

And he thought about it.

An amazing, sugary kiss.

That it was the best kiss he had ever experienced in his life.

(More—)

With emotions emerging in his chest, he powerfully grasped her shoulders.

Just like this—。

More—。

Thinking that—。

"ngh"

Suddenly, Taiyou opened his eyes wide, face painted with bewilderment.

Amazingly enough, they had done a surface-level kiss, but Leticia was the one who had stuck her tongue through their lips.

Their tongues were being aggressively—no, offensively intertwined.

Taiyou was shocked, but he would become even more shocked.

When he saw Leticia's face in front of him.

The face of someone caught in a fever, of someone whose reasoning had flown away. The face of a female who had nothing in her head but seeking males.....a primal face.

Was this what she meant by "state"? Was this the source of her indecision?

Thinking those thoughts, the next moment.

——Thud.

Taiyou fell pushed down to the floor.

Chapter 147: The Princess of Phili / Probably Frustrating

Hera continued steadily rising straight up into the starry sky. The speed she was going at was enough to potentially break through the atmosphere and ride along a satellite's orbit.

"Wow, he totally did it, as expected of Taiyou-chan, it's amazing that he kissed even with an actual princess"

Still soaring from Taiyou's throw, she sensed what was happening from afar: that the amount of girls who could see her—those who had kissed Taiyou—had increased by one.

Kotone, Suzune, Kazane.

Kohaku and Youran.

Aoba, and then Pochi.

Following them, the girls who could see her had increased by one.

It went without saying that she was excited about the girls able to hold a conversation with her had increased by one, as she enjoyed chit-chatting, but she also felt a more pure joy differing from that.

Natsuno Taiyou. The boy who was raising his level in real life, wielding a shovel and assembling seven brides.

Hera boasted him as her master. She was in adoration of his growth/achievements, which were directly connected to her joy. She felt like thanking the unknown god who had birthed her next to him.

So she was now extremely delighted.

Purified joy filled her small chest.

She felt like announcing her feelings to all the humans of the world.

"That's right, I need to notify Kohaku-tan and the others too"

Hera remembered the ones who she most wanted to share the news with. To better deliver that joy, she finally put the emergency brakes on her powerful rising speed, rearranging her stance midair. Once she had suddenly arrived at the stratosphere, she took in Kohaku and company's location again, flying off in that direction.

Changing course with the orbit of an acute angle, she rapidly descended for the Japanese archipelago.

She descended with even more power than when she had ascended. Not long afterward, she began to see her destination.

It was a trailer with the size of a bus connected to a towing bus, parked in open land at a normal pier.

"The Running One-Room", possessing a rustic exterior while hiding extraordinary livability within.

Hera powerfully flew into the motor home that Kohaku and the others were doubtlessly riding.

Beyond the walls she had slipped through was a living area, and Kohaku was there by herself.

A youthful-looking elderly woman. She was in a camisole of high exposure, revealing her undeveloped limbs of one hundred thirty centimeters, leaning by herself toward a glass illuminated by the warm-colored lighting. Her lightly flushed cherry blossom-colored skin was emitting a glamorous sort of smell, and if Taiyou were here this appearance probably would have been enough to instantly kill his reasoning.

"Kohaku-tan"

"So it's ye. What are ye doing at this time?"

"Is it just you Kohaku-tan, what happened to everyone"

"The date is different here, they're already asleep"

"Ohhh nooo"

Screaming in a joking manner, Hera flew to the bedroom area, confirming that Kotone, the other two sisters, and Pochi were sleeping, breathing

peacefully. Afterward, returning with slight dejection, she landed softly on top of the table in front of Kohaku.

"What has ailed ye, coming here at this time. Is Husband well"

"Yes indeed, I actually have a report concerning Taiyou-chan"

"Hohh"

Kohaku's eyes glinted. She looked at Hera with an immensely curious face.

"Has something happened? Did he meet with some sort of lass"

"Yes indeed. As expected of Kohaku-tan, understanding so quickly"

"Oho"

"Actually, there is now one more person who can see me"

"Hohh, yet another quick turn of events. So what type of lass is she ? "

"Umm.....Phili? She's the princess of that country"

"Princess Leticia eh"

Kohaku replied almost immediately, slightly startling Hera.

"That person. Kohaku-tan knows that person ? "

"I have not actually met her. But someone as prominent as that I have learned about one-sidedly from the other side of the cathode-ray tube"

"What is a cathode-ray tube ? "

"Yer lacking in the strangest ways. I saw her on television, in the news and whatnot"

"I see, she is a princess after all"

"That she is. One of the princesses in the Phili kingdom, perpendicular to the equator and the most pro-Japan country. I have heard that she is able ter speak Japanese like a native, but be it true?"

She said, looking to Hera for confirmation.

"Yes indeed, she spoke normally. She said things like "ain't" and "now look here""

"Closely reminds me of a certain singer"

Kohaku giggled.

"Be as it may, ta get a princess ta capitulate on the first day o' parting, I must say that much is ta be expected o' Husband"

"Yes indeed ! As expected of my Taiyou-chan "

"So ye came ter let me know that, eh"

"Not quite. He said that he did not want me to watch him kissing Her Majesty, and then Taiyou-chan chased me out"

"Hoh? That is a waste"

"Why is that ? "

Hera tilted her small head in puzzlement. While Kohaku's face was amused, it also seemed to show actual disappointment.

"The kiss of the Phili royal family is amazing, though it be but a rumor"

"It's amazing ? "

"I know not about Princess Leticia, but her father, the current Phili king's kiss is really something else"

"Just how amazing is it ? "

"He was a virgin till he had kissed a thousand people"

"Woow, that is amazing"

"I see that ye do not hide yer admiration, well whatever"

Tilting the glass, Kohaku poured an amber-colored liquid into her stomach.

"So it's the princess of Phili, is it"

Kohaku mumbled, deep in thought. Hera looked at her quizzically.

"What is the matter ? "

"Ahh, it be not very important but.....I was just thinking that the lasses he be making his own be gradually increasing, ye see"

"That does seem to be the case"

"I was wondering just how far we could go. While that's happening"

"While that is happening ? "

"In the end we may very well be forced to fight for the seats of the seven people, that's just what I was thinking"

Kohaku said, although her face was quite amused.

"Well I will be returning to where Taiyou is"

"Wait a sec"

Kohaku stopped Hera, who was about to make a teleport over to where Taiyou was.

"What is the matter ? "

"Right now, we are purposefully avoiding contact with Taiyou, aye?"

"Yes, that is the case"

Puzzled, she leaned her whole body toward Kohaku.

"We are avoiding contact between Kohaku-tan as well as Taiyou-chan so that Pochi-chan does not get captured"

"Aye, fearing the danger of the possibility of some sort of information leaking out via telepathic contact, that was what we decided"

"What about it ? "

"That decision, I like it if you change it a mite"

"In what way ? "

"We are avoiding contact ordinarily, and in exchange can you show your face here every 12 hours or 24 hours? Should be fine if you're the one to travel here to contact us, eh?"

"That would certainly be impossible for normal humans to detect....."

Slightly thinking, Hera asked back.

"But then would you not be considered "in contact"? I cannot be captured by any enemy nor discovered, but is it not a bit bad to be communicating in the first place?"

"It very well possibly be bad, but our first decision might very well be meaningless"

"You still wish to proceed ? "

"I think it be good. I not be forcing ye.....Hmm, how about on the condition 'o Husband giving his permission?"

"I understand, I will inquire from Taiyou-chan"

"Please do"

Kohaku said, lightly bowing.

In this unusual situation, Hera decided to first convey this to Taiyou and look to his decision.

She could only sense the whereabouts of the women he had kissed, but she could teleport as well to where Taiyou was.

Parting ways with Kohaku, Hera teleported to where Taiyou was with the ease of respirating.

"Taiyou-chan Taiyou-chan I have something to discuss with you— —wait what has happened Taiyou-chan ! "

Returning instantly to the ferry's cabin where Taiyou was, Hera was perplexed at the sight in front of her completely out of the blue.

Taiyou was pushed down by Leticia, and like a beast, as if she had gone insane, she was kissing him all over.

"What has happened Taiyou-chan, why are you being reverse-raped ? "

If Taiyou had any remaining power he likely would have retorted. For once Hera had actually said something that wasn't wrong, but he would have probably retorted.

But he did not, as he could not.

Pushed down by Leticia, Taiyou was convulsing.

Chapter 148: The Princess of Phili / Some Sort of Dream

It was a nostalgia much like returning to one's hometown.

The surroundings were glistening as if wrapped in light.

There was a pretty river flowing in front he had never seen before, and beyond the river were leafless trees, shining with light and standing still.

He found a familiar face beneath a tree.

Smiling at her, Taiyou moved toward the riverbank.

"So that's where you were, I was searching for you"

The shovel on the other side of the river was beckoning him. The upper portion was chipped off, but its beauty had not changed in the slightest. Of course, as the beauty of a shovel would surely not diminish with something of that level.

She was ceaselessly beckoning Taiyou, with the kind of bashful face that lovers made.

Telling him "Come quickly, come to my side".

"Don't rush me, I'm coming to you now"

Returning her smile, he motioned to ford the river, stepping into the water.

He wanted to get to her side as quickly as possible so that he could caress her handle, kiss the cross section of her cut blade.

He wanted to say thank you and get cozy.

Suddenly, the shovel made a sad face.

"What's wrong, why are you suddenly making such a face ? "

This was a face he had never seen before. A painful, sad face that was unbecoming of her.

"That face isn't like you"

After all, she was a shovel. Shovels must not make such faces. Just like how sauce doesn't go with eggs sunny side up, sad faces don't go with shovels either.

Thinking that, Taiyou made to quickly dash to her side.

"Huh? I musn't cross the river ? But if I don't cross then I can't very well go to where you are, now can I"

While he was puzzling over what she was saying, that person appeared next to her. He put a hand on her shoulder, truly trying to suggest that they were close.

She did not reject him. Though she was still making a sad face, she accepted his advances willingly.

No way that could——No way something that ridiculous was——。

"Wait, do you mean to tell me that he's there now so you no longer need me? That guy.....you guys——"

"Shovels and scoopers are different races ! ! ! "

"Wah ! "

He alertly straightened up. There was no longer any sign of the river, the female shovel, or the paramour scooper.

"Where.....am I ? "

His head unable to keep up, he furtively surveyed his surroundings. His eyes met with Hera's worried gaze in an unfamiliar room.

"Are you all right, Taiyou-chan?"

"Y-Yeah....."

"Can you understand me? How much is 256×256 ? "

"Not even a normal person could calculate that in their head ! "

Taiyou shouted. Calculating three-digit numbers and beyond was an art impossible to utilize even when his head was in its best condition.

"How terrible, Taiyou-chan could not even say 65536 ! You must go to a

hospital as soon as possible"

"Ohh.....You mean FFFF+1"

As Hera panicked, Taiyou understood by those words.

It wasn't mental arithmetic. These were numbers that he should know very well.

"It's okay, I understand. My head is fine"

"Are you sure ? "

"Yeah"

Taiyou nodded, and Hera gave a sigh of relief seeing that.

Seeing her do that, he recalled the events from before losing consciousness.

A sugary-tasting hell.

Blissfulness spreading from the lips, and anguish rising from the inability to breath.

It was happy, but painful. He wanted to continue, but he could not.

He thought that out of the two vying for control, happiness slightly had the upper hand. Taiyou thought that the most amazing way to die in this world might very well be suffocation from kissing.

His kiss with her was just that rough and amazing.

While relishing the happy feeling filling his chest, he surveyed his surroundings. He searched for her.

In the corner of the room, he found Leticia huddling against the wall.

Was she embarrassed, or frightened?

After seeing her[state of being], Taiyou thought either one was possible.

Whichever it was, Taiyou thought it might be good to cushion the impact.

"Hera"

"Yes indeed"

"Could you greet her"

"Ohhh, right you are, I had still not done that"

It seemed that the small fairy's worries had been swept away by her exchange with Taiyou. Just as she had been told, in high spirits, she flew to Leticia.

She maneuvered in front of the girl facing the wall.

"Ah"

"Pleased to meet you, I am Hera"

"Yer.....the joker ? "

"Yes indeed! Yes indeed to the max ! "

"T-To the max ? "

"It is nothing— . Which reminds me, congratulations on your kiss with Taiyou-chan"

"Oo....."

At a loss for words, her body trembled. Farther away, Taiyou reflexively gave a bittersweet smile at her reaction.

It was no doubt the kiss that had caused this.

The moment they had kissed, she had pushed Taiyou down as if changing her personality.

Taiyou was interested to know how she became that way.

"Have you.....experienced this sort of thing before ? "

"Huh ? "

Surprised, Leticia peered backwards over her shoulders.

"I mean, you knew this would happen"

His interest had been altered.

At first he hadn't seen it as anything other than something that he might want to ask her.

But the moment she had answered, it had transformed into different

emotions within Taiyou.

His chest felt queasy, the kind of feeling that made you want to vent your anger no matter what.

Jealousy.

She might have experienced it already.....a kiss with another male.

When he thought that, Taiyou felt overwhelmed with jealousy.

That was an emotion he had almost never experienced until now.

Even if he knew of it, this was a feeling he had not experienced.

Taiyou had more than he could bear.

If that were indeed the case— —

"T-That ain't true ! "

Flustered, Leticia denied it with all her might.

"Ah ain't nevah kissed. This was mah first ! "

"It's...really your first ? "

"Y-Yup ! "

"Oh, really....."

Taiyou was visibly relieved, and Hera who was watching grinned. Leticia averted herself with a red face.

First time kissing, the first kiss.

Taiyou, having participated in the kiss, was so happy that he forgot to remain composed, and at the same time, the thing that had been jealousy reverted back to curiosity.

Regaining his composure, he asked her about that.

"Then why did you know.....that you'd get into that state"

"That's because.....mah sistas, mah sistas all experienced it"

"Ah, you did say that you had older sisters huh"

"Yup"

"I see, so that's how it is"

"Sorry.....for becomin' like this"

Resigning herself, Leticia slowly stood up, turning to Taiyou.

"Didn't think I'd knock ya out"

"Don't worry about it, I don't hold it against you"

"Ahm really.....sorry"

After saying it once more, Leticia took a deep breath, reigning in her facial expression.

Somehow understanding that she was the same type as Youran who could switch character, Taiyou held her in high regard.

Said girl was staring straight at the now-visible Hera.

"This is the joker dat gurl was talkin' 'bout eh"

"Yeah"

"The heck is this"

"Referring to me as "this" is mean, Letii-chan"

Hera protested with both hands held out.

"If that is what you think then I must show Letii-chan my grandeur"

"Grandeur ? "

"Yes indeed, now Taiyou-chan please move over there"

".....If it's a lunge for my groin area I'll be counter attacking with my shovel, kay"

He reproachfully glared at Hera. She gazed in wonderment, thereafter dropping her shoulders.

"I am indeed powerless....."

"Did you seriously plan to do that ! And there's got to be more to your grandeur than that ! "

"There is.....more to it ? "

Chapter 149: The Princess of Phili / New Type

"What's amazing about her ? "

She said so meekly that it could have been on purpose.....Unlike Hera who made a gag face, Leticia asked him with such sincerity.

Wanting to bring Hera into the equation for rescuing her best friend Youran, her earnestness was not to be underestimated.

Taiyou thought he had best give an earnest answer.

"Fundamentally, she can't be seen by anyone other than us, nor can she be touched"

"When you say anyone other than us you mean.....you and, umm....."

As if the crucial word were stuck in her throat, Leticia faltered. A hint of scarlet appeared on her graceful white face.

Taiyou thought that her mannerism of shying her eyes away was cute.

"Yeah, only those I've done it with"

He thought that, but kept it to himself. While pretending to not notice, he firmly nodded and answered.

"We can see her and touch her but.....wait what ? Could anyone other than me touch her ? "

Remembering that he had indeed never heard that, asking Hera.

"They can—"

Hera flew straight to where Leticia was, landing on her shoulders like a small bird.

The wings on her back shut closed, and she was no longer floating in the air but riding completely on Leticia's shoulders.

"It's true, ah really can"

"Yes indeed, because you became able to touch me—. Although you can touch but not attack. Because Taiyou is the only one in this world who can kill me"

"That right"

"Apparently. Also.....Right, she can detect your location, and can warp to where I am from anywhere, that much I can say"

".....So, a spy"

She said in a clear tone after making a pensive face.

Thinking she was referring to the most advantageous way to make use of her ability, Taiyou agreed.

"Yeah, that's right"

"That's absurd, a spy that can't be seen or stopped ain't even fair. Ah can really get it when she called her yer joker. If she can warp too then ya can even use 'er as a communication method to make interception impossible. Well ain't dat something....."

"Uuu"

Suddenly, for whatever reason Hera who was riding on her shoulders began shaking.

When Taiyou was wondering what the matter was, Hera rapidly flew to Leticia's face, chewing it.

Leticia fretted as if being bitten by a pet. Hera let out an exaggeratingly emotional voice.

"Letii-chan-sama ! "

"Chan-sama ? "

"Might I, may I call you Master ? "

"What kind of nationality are you"

"The only one who recognized me is Letii-chan"

"Hey hey, you're saying I haven't?"

"Taiyou-chan treats me slovenly, he'll punch me, throw me, strip me, ogle me, you name it"

"Don't say such scandalous things! And the latter part is completely fabricated ! "

"Ya.....had that sort of taste, eh"

"That's a false accusation ! I like proper normal girls ! "

Taiyou desperately protested.

"But but, Taiyou-chan's loli ratio is currently two-thirds, right ? If we estimate for later it'll be three-fourths, you know ? "

"So you did have those tastes after all....."

Leticia looked coldly at Taiyou.

"Like I said, false accusations! Kohaku is an Eternal Little, Kazane is my classmate, and even Shirokiyami has good style, dammit"

"So you did not deny that one ? "

"Huh ? "

Taiyou looked blankly. He wondered what she meant by saying "not deny".

"Well, I dun really care whether yer a lolicon, pedophile, trash digger, or whatever"

"Like I said, false accusations ! "

"Ya know where dat gurl's location is ? "

Ignoring the retorting Taiyou, Leticia turned and spoke to Hera.

"Uhh, do you mean Youran's location ? "

"Right"

"I do know ? Right now.....ah, she is together with Aoba-chan"

"They're together ? "

Taiyou was astonished.

"Yes indeed. It seems that Aoba is bothered, but Youran-chan is sort of....."

hmm, enjoying.....it ? "

"Dat gurl's probably plottin' summat"

Leticia said with a sigh.

"Could ya jump to where dat gurl is real quick? Ah wat ya to give 'er a word"

"That is fine—、 what should I tell her ? "

"Dun move, wait right dere"

"That is all you wish to say ? "

Hera was puzzled.

"Ya wanna see da cool side of yer master, don't ya? Rather dan her escaping by her own strength, innit be better if I were da one to come 'n gallantly rescue her?"

"I see what you are saying"

"Well den, I leave it to ya"

"Yes indeed, I shall be back"

Hera said, slipping through the wall and flying outside.

After watching her leave, Leticia took a brief sigh.

"Now ah can have a more serious conversation wit ya"

"—— ! Then you purposefully had Hera go ? "

"Yeah"

Shocked, for an instant, Taiyou thought she felt like an old acquaintance.

However, that was but for an instant.

"Dis ain't da time to be verbally attackin' lolicons"

"For the last time, I'm not a freaking lolicon ! ! ! "

Taiyou retorted with more force than earlier.

He was about to have to bear the cross that no man must bear, so this was the natural reaction.

"Men who do a few deeds here 'n dere look more developed, bein' a lolicon ain't a bad way to go"

"I'm saying that's not it"

"Anyhoo, let's talk 'bout dat gurl"

".....You mean Youran ? "

Clearing his name was also important, but right now Youran and Aoba along with her were more important, so Taiyou had no choice but to back down.

"Yup. Dat gurl's a fool"

"Fool ? "

"She's a gurl who rushes to move on her own if left alone. Even now she's probably tryin' to escape with her own power"

"You sure ? "

"In all probability, yeah. The Aoba gurl's in trouble innit? She'll prolly be manipulated into that gurl's way of doin' things"

"Makes sense"

"Dat gurl's a fool, I wonder if she ever does anything that ain't stupid from time 'n time again"

Leticia repeated the same word "fool". Exasperation was mixed in abundantly in her tone.

"What do you mean ? "

"Ya know dat gurl's hobby ? "

"Hobby ? "

"Yes hobby, she's a shinobi. Shi-No-Bi. Changing outfits 'n exploring towns and dis earth 'n whatnot is her hobby"

Leticia said full of sarcasm

"She's in a position where she ain't able to do dat, yet her disposition forces her to do everything by herself that she wants to do"

"Yeah, it was the same when we first met"

Nodding, Taiyou recounted his chance meeting with her.

While being a noble personage, she had still plunged herself into enemy territory.

"Innit? Dat gurl's a fool. I bet she's thinking even now dat girls 'n da like who can't escape with deir own power are outta fashion"

".....Have you known her for a while ? "

"What's dis all of a sudden? Welp.....we known each other since before we were born"

"Like in a previous life ? "

"Dis ain't occult talk, I mean politics"

"Politics ? "

He asked back tilting his head, wondering what she meant.

"It was summat dat my dad 'n dat gurl's old man decided. If da next child born is da opposite sex den let's marry 'em off-the usual"

"That seriously happens?"

"Sure does, dat's why ah said we been knowin' each other since birth. Although da only reason why we're still taggin' along wit eachoth'a is cuz we get along"

"You must be close"

"In our own way yeah"

"So from your standpoint, she wouldn't think that sort of thing.....is for her"

"It ain't"

Leticia said plainly.

"It's like Zhuge Liang steppin' out into da front lines, in dat gurl's case. She could just be honest with herself 'n employ people"

"Yui Shousetsu?"

"Choukoudou. Pretty good for yer age"

"And pretty good for you considering you're a foreigner"

"Cool if ah ask ya summat too ? "

"Yeah"

"Ya kissed wit dat gurl didn't ya"

".....Yeah"

Unlike earlier, Leticia had this time without hesitation put the word "kiss" to her mouth.

What sort of difference was between the two? What caused this change in her mental state?

He was curious, but he decided to go ahead and answer directly, until...

"Ya in love wit her ? "

He could not immediately answer that next question.

Chapter 150: The Princess of Phili / Before the Counterattack

Leticia's eyes were earnest, but he couldn't feel any sticky emotions.

The emotions that he had read from there were different from the passion he had felt shortly before kissing her: a faint, gentle feeling of affection.

So Taiyou answered seriously.

"I'm not sure"

"Ya say ya ain't sure ? "

"Yeah, I'm not sure. I do like her as a person, and I probably even respect her. But when you ask me if I like her or not....."

"Ya'd say ya dunno"

"Right"

"....."

Leticia fell completely silent. She seemed to be making some sort of frown.

"What's up ? "

"I just thought if it were ya"

"If it were me ? "

"Ain't nothin'"

Leticia silently shook her head.

"Taiyou-chan Taiyou-chan ! "

Hera warped back at that time. Seeing that, Leticia muttered to herself "So she really can warp".

"What's happened to make you so flustered? Did you not find her ? "

"No! I can find Taiyou-chan's important people even if they're spirited away. No, I am saying that Youran is trying to escape by herself"

"Ah thought so"

"It was just as you said"

"What will you do ? "

"Please stop her, it's too dangerous"

"I did stop her, I stopped her together with Aoba-chan, but——"

"Well dat gurl is stubborn on top of bein' a fool"

She said, breathing a sober sigh of "Haah"

"What should we do"

"Could ya leap over dere again ? Give her a word from me"

"Yes indeed, what should I tell her ? "

"[Lolipop]"

"Loli..... ? "

Hera quizzically tilted her head, speaking with a straight face as she stared at Leticia.

"Just tell 'er dat, dat gurl would git it"

"I understand ! "

Nodding vigorously, she once again slipped through the wall and flew off.

"And this time ? "

"It's an inside thing between me 'n dat gurl. Guess ya could call it a trump card"

".....If you say that then she'll listen to you ? "

"Right on.....Ain't ya gonna ask why ? "

"I get that it's a method that you can use so that's fine"

".....I see"

"You see ? "

Inclining his head, Taiyou repeated the same words. She was a foreigner so

he thought that she had messed up on her word choice, but it seemed that wasn't the case.

Because Leticia's expression was the face of a human's unique feeling of satisfaction.

Taiyou didn't pursue it. Just like he had said earlier, this was not the time to be doing that.

"Let me hear something else. Conveying those words to her.....how much would that halt her movement?"

"I can stop her from bein' a fool, dat much ah promise. But dat gurl also ain't no fool, she'd move with her own decision if things got dangerous"

A fool yet not a fool. Taiyou was about to chuckle, but the corner of his mouth didn't move.

"Then, I guess it's best to think she'll wait until we do something"

"Das right"

"But.....if Aoba is together with her then.....I cannot properly move"

Briefly cutting himself off, he stared straight at Leticia, afterward breaking the ice with resolution.

"Between Aoba and her, I prioritize Aoba"

"Course, dat's also what she wants, dun worry 'bout it"

"Sorry"

"So ya wanna go"

".....Yeah"

Nodding, Taiyou stared straight at Leticia.

Taiyou was not the kind of man who could wait for the results in a safe place. If he were in dangerous territory he would jump in, gaining the results for himself if necessary.

He had managed to raise his level to the max in all the games he had once played, but he had not once had someone do it for him or done any sort of

automatic level up.

He had always raised each level by his own hand.

If Aoba hadn't been taken hostage, he would no doubt have taken his shovel in hand and plunged right into the middle of the enemy encampment as soon as possible.

"Let her go"

"Eh ? "

"Ya said let her go too didn't ya"

Taiyou was astonished at her proposal.

"B-But do you think Youran will....."

"Leave it to me"

She said, clapping her hands together. When she did so the door was opened, and the two black-clothed males who had been guarding at the time when he had woken up entered.

"You called for us?"

The men inquired in fluent Japanese.

"Assemble da troops, we're gonna invade"

"Are you certain, if Leticia moves the wrong way we fear that this may become a diplomatic issue"

"If dat gurl gits 'er 'ands back on authority den it'll be alright"

"Understood"

"Also, prepare an extra garment of yer clothes.....sometin' dat fits this boy's size"

She said, pointing to Taiyou.

"My size ? "

"Very well"

While Taiyou thought it strange, the two subordinates bowed without

hesitation.

Once Leticia had exuded the atmosphere that orders were over, the black-clothed men retreated wordlessly.

"What do you mean ? "

"The reason why dat gurl let ya escape was basically to not let da enemy realize dat she interacted wit ya"

".....Oh, so if I become your subordinate and collaborate"

"Right, it ain't gonna be Natsuno Taiyou and Miki Aoba, it's gonna be 'bout Juunishima Youran and Leticia H Keraaz. As long as dis composition is here then yer bride shouldn't be used"

"But then you and her will——"

"Dat's our problem, 'n besides, there ain't no jurisdiction Tsukumo has for killin' us. Plus he needs New Moon Director to abdicate, 'n if he kills us it's gonna be a diplomatic issue"

"I-I see"

"What ya gotta remember are two things. Not letting yer identity git found out 'n gittin' yer bride in one fell swoop, dat's it"

"That's it? Sounds fairly difficult though"

He said, but Taiyou's tone had become quite carefree.

Which was because——

"It became clear to ya dinnit"

"Sure did"

"I'll ask just in case, yer bride is da priority innit? Moreso den dat gurl"

"Yeah"

Taiyou nodded plainly, but Leticia asked him once again confirming.

"So ya really can endure it if by any chance dat gurl seems like she might git shot"

".....Yeah"

He slightly hesitated, but at last Taiyou clearly nodded.

Aoba, rather than Youran.

Taiyou once again made distinct his priorities.

"Good then"

".....You really are a princess eh"

The two of them both changed for heading out to where Youran was.

Leticia changed into a resplendent princess outfit. She was already a beautiful blonde-haired blue-eyed girl, but she shifted to that of a princess adorning herself in a noble atmosphere.

"Course, whaddya think ah am?"

"A performance from a foreign country with an odd Kansai dialect"

"Why ya say dat ! "

Leticia quipped. Her tone and wrist snap were perfect, but her princess atmosphere was too strong and irregular.

"It dun.....resemble ya too well"

"Cause I've never worn this type of clothing before"

Taiyou smiled bitterly.

He was wearing the clothing that Leticia had prepared for her subordinates. It was an outfit with black clothing and sunglasses in addition to swept-back hair.

Image changed entirely, Taiyou had achieved a transformation that was so different than normal that even those acquainted with Natsuno Taiyou wouldn't recognize him, but on the other hand he was full of discomfort at the unfitting outfit.

"Well, it ain't bad"

"Yeah ? "

"Yer like a greenhorn who received the honor of becoming my subordinate, so in dat meanin' it ain't bad"

"Alright"

"Ahm gonna actually put ya in dat position, should be easy for ya to move when the time is right"

"Got it"

"Afterwards— —"

"I'll protect you until then"

"Eh ? "

Leticia was surprised.

Chapter 151: The Princess of Phili / The Kiss Princess

"What do you mean by—ngh"

Grabbing ahold of Leticia's shoulders, who was trying to say something, he pulled her to him and covered her mouth with a kiss.

Opening her eyes wide, she squirmed with a mumbling voice, but as expected, she could not win against Taiyou's power.

She desperately resisted, struggling as if to say "I won't let you do as you please with my heart or even my body".

However, she could not get away. Taiyou would not let go of her.

At length—she switched.

He could feel the touch of her chest. This was a strength unlike earlier. Sensing that she had finally changed, he relaxed his power, letting her push him down as she saw fit.

Pushed down onto the soft rug, he was now being straddled.

"Fu—、ha—"

Leticia's breathing intensified.

Taiyou's eyes clearly saw it. The girl's beautiful sapphire eyes were bloodshot.

Her eyes that had become filled with that reminded him of the red light emitted by a demonic moon.

Taiyou thought she was like a devilish girl.

Fleshy lips were pressed onto his, and his tongue invaded through her mouth.

With just a kiss.....Just by mouth and tongue connecting he felt like he'd lose consciousness.

(It's definitely.....different)

Moreso than any kiss he'd done thus far— —pleasure greater than connecting with her body attacked him.

This was the same earlier. He was suddenly overcome by her transforming resistance.

A rough and alluring kiss.

But he thought it was different, very different.

And at this rate it would be the same outcome as earlier.

To prevent that, Taiyou bolstered himself— —pushing down Leticia's tongue.

"Mm ? "

A slight expression of astonishment appeared in her intoxicated eyes.

Not heeding that, he gently pecked at her lips.

He could hear a voice of entreaty. A voice without words that was full of suffocation and seduction.

A voice telling him to do more, much more.

He anticipated that if he were to respond, he would doubtlessly gain a pleasure that elevated even the times he had made love with the three sisters or Kohaku or the others.

His heart moved fretfully in response to that.

(That's, no good)

But he did not answer, he must not answer.

He had gone so far as to kiss her going with the flow of the moment.....
Preparing himself for what came afterward would lose its meaning.

Overcoming the allure of entwining their tongues, he ended it with a simple, sweet kiss.

Releasing his tongue, he continued pecking.

Occasionally he would stick his tongue in between their lips, pecking her

lips.

"Nhhaa....."

Carnal breathing escaped her mouth, and when he was wondering what that breathing meant——

"Ah....."

A voice evaporated from Taiyou's mouth. Leticia, who had been trying to entwine their tongues, had switched to pecking their lips just like Taiyou.

Leticia responded to Taiyou's lure.

A slow kiss.

If he were to put it in words it would probably be called that. It was a loose, sweet, suffocating kiss.

They each began sharing their hot starch syrup. It was that kind of kiss.

Smooch, smooch.....

A reserved liquidy sound reverberated between the two. With the room enveloped in silence, it was a sound heard from deep within the body.

After a moment, Leticia slowly deattached herself.

"I dunno....."

"Huh ? "

Surprised by such a clear-willed voice, he looked up at the straddling girl.

The eyes beyond the blonde, dragonlike hair spilling from her shoulders..... blue eyes that reminded him of the quiet ocean were staring his way.

"I dunno.....this kinda kiss"

"That's、 probably to be expected"

"Wrong ! "

Leticia denied in a decisive, unmoving voice.

"Ah dun mean dat. It's true dat yer mah first partner, but I dun mean dat. Ahm Philian royalty. Ah always been lookin' at mah dad, mum, 'n big sistas

kissin'. Dey did nun' but dat kinda kiss, all o' dem"

He didn't have to ask her what kind of kiss she meant.

Taiyou wordlessly stared back at her.

"Dis kinda kiss.....Ah knew 'bout it but Ah din' know. Ah thought Ah musn' do such a thing"

"Everyone does that kind of kiss?"

"Right, Ah din know dat.....dat was summat bad"

"It's not bad"

This time Taiyou was the one who firmly spoke.

He spoke in the kind of tone that a teacher would to a child when instructing them.

"Huh ? "

"There's no way that kind of kiss is bad. Even I do that sort of kiss with Kotone and Suzune and Kazane, as well as Kohaku-san. We do the kind of kiss that makes your face go pale and logic flies out the window"

"Ya.....do ? "

"Yeah, we do"

He nodded clearly as if affirming her.

"T-Then why ya do such a thing? Ya din do it ta tell me dat it's bad ? "

"It wouldn't be a mistake to say that it wasn't good enough leaving it as is. I wasn't kissing you to prove that it was a bad thing"

Leticia inclined her head. She stared at him with forlorn eyes.

"It's a problem of timing, order"

"Order ? "

"Yes. Maybe it'd be best to illustrate your kiss as the main dish of a full course"

"Seems like yer prejudiced ta me"

"If so then I apologize"

"But Ah git what yer sayin'. In order.....not leanin' toward any one kiss and givin' everythin' a fair chance right"

"I think so. Actually——"

"Ngh——"

He pulled her face and put his lips to hers. Going between the surprised girl's lips, he thrust in his tongue and initiated a thick kiss: the main dish.

Leticia was shocked in amazement, but soon accepted Taiyou's kiss, closing her eyes.

They kissed violently and roughly.

After a bit, their lips separated, leaving behind a trail of silver.

"What ya.....doin'"

"Don't you think we should start in order....."

"Ya speak like a yakuza....."

The blonde-haired blue-eyed princess resentfully spoke in her Kansai dialect.

But that tone still seemed like it was agreeing with his opinion on all counts.

"So ya wanted ta show me dat"

"Plus I wanted to know"

"Know what ? "

"The kiss with you was spectacular. That kiss earlier was sweet like rising to heaven as I was one-sidedly overwhelmed.....On the other hand, I know that if I make the proper preparations before reaching there then it becomes so much better. I wanted to know.....how much better it would feel if we did it properly"

"Yer selfish....."

"Also, one more thing"

"What ? "

"I wanted to say that I want to protect you"

"Say what ? "

"You intend to be quite reckless right ? "

".....Why ya think dat"

The color on Leticia's face changed. The sweet air that had been there earlier had blown off without a trace, replacing it with the kind of air reminiscent of a cat's hair standing rigidly on end.

"I get it, it should have been fine to pick any old location, yet taking me all the way out to sea and taking shelter, you're trying to go back. I understand it requires a lot of resolve without having to think about it"

"....."

"I heard that you're the princess of a whole country, a state guest. Said princess took her subordinates along entering Japanese territory with the resolve to have a fight depending on the situation. That's fine, cause your relationship with Youran is well-known. But you're even ready to take all the responsibility on yourself if something occurs, aren't you"

"Dat's ma duty"

"When a boy sees a girl taking all the responsibility on herself, he does tend to get more and more stubborn"

"Troublesome, boys are"

"Lay the blame on me if things get bad.....although you probably won't listen even if I say that"

"Yup, not happenin'"

Leticia firmly nodded.

"Responsibility's only ta be taken by da one in da position ta take it. If ya push responsibility on someone who can't take it then ya ain't gonna be thought as nun' but a lizard's cut-off tail. Ain't no meanin' in dat"

"Basically, no matter how hard I try, I can't take on your responsibility, you're saying"

"Ahm da third princess of da Phili kingdom, Leticia H Keraaz. Mah

responsibility is mahn alone"

Saying that, Leticia was radiating a solemnity reminiscent of Youran.

This was the strength and solemnity unique to humand who are well aware of their position and duty.

This was something he had half expected, which was why Taiyou had kissed her and had the conversation progress this far.

He spoke to Leticia.

"Then, what can be done to ensure that you never have to undertake such responsibility ? "

".....Ya sane ? "

"I understand that it's enough of a major undertaking for you to use the word "sane""

The two of them stared at each other briefly.

Taiyou sprawled on the floor and Leticia on top of him as she stared at him.

The two of them briefly stared at each other.

Eye and eye gazing into one another, this exchange was enough to equal many words.

"Got it, den——guess we should check da victory conditions"

Said girl's tone was joking, but her eyes were serious.

Above all, she very much so resembled the girl named Youran.